

I Shall Seal the Heavens

(我欲封天)

Book 3

The Honor of Violet Fate

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(刘勇)

Story Description:

Shall Seal the Heavens is currently one of the most popular xianxia stories in China. It is about a failed young scholar named Meng Hao who gets forcibly recruited into a Sect of Immortal Cultivators. In the Cultivation world, the strong prey on the weak, and the law of the jungle prevails. Meng Hao must adapt to survive. And yet, he never forgets the Confucian and Daoist ideals that he grew up studying. This, coupled with his stubborn nature, set him on the path of a true hero. What does it mean to “Seal the Heavens?” This is a secret that you will have to uncover along with Meng Hao!

Original Story can be found here: [Link](#)

Chapter 205: Dispelling Poison with the Cubic Pearl!

The rain continued to fall, but the horizon was no longer pitch black. Moonlight could be seen through the clouds, and far in the distance, the glow of the morning sun was just becoming visible. Night was beginning to fade, and sunlight approached.

As the sun replaced the moon, rain fell down, and Meng Hao proceeded onward. His expression was calm, as if nothing had just happened. This rainy day made him think about the snow back in the State of Zhao.

He wasn't sure exactly where he was within the Southern Domain. The only thing he could see was a mountain range that stretched off into the distance. His only company was the falling rain and the cold wind.

His battle with Zhou Jie had confirmed the battle prowess of his five Dao Pillars. He could definitely suppress Dao Children, the most powerful of the Foundation Establishment stage!

"Unfortunately, I'm still lacking in terms of techniques," he thought. "I have a similar problem with magical items, otherwise I could have completely crushed him." He walked along in the rain, lost in thought. The Cultivation world was much different from the life of a scholar. He was gradually learning how to identify his weaknesses. He could not allow his weaknesses to cause his next battle to end with his own death.

"There's not much I can do regarding magical techniques. Joining the Violet Fate Sect would help a lot, if I could somehow figure out a way. However... as for magical items...." Meng Hao frowned.

All of his magical items had been acquired through battle. However, the more powerful his Cultivation base grew, the less effective his magical items became. The wooden swords, the lightning mist and the little black net all grew with him, but as for the fan, the bow and the other items, they were gradually becoming less and less useful.

"I'm not completely stuck in this regard, though. I have two methods

which can be used to forge magical items. I could go to the Black Lands to search for the Frigid Snow Larva. If I feed it the Sieve Net Thunder Mulberry Leaf, it will transform into the Woodless Larva, which can produce indestructible silk threads! ¹

“I also have the jade page from Han Bei’s ancestor which can be used to forge the Time treasure. Either one of these two could solve my current problem. Unfortunately... both are incredibly difficult, and can’t be accomplished quickly. Of course, there’s also the flag with three streamers, although I can’t even touch it with my current Cultivation base...” He shook his head, looking around at the unceasing rain. It seemed to be growing heavier. Meng Hao’s body flickered, and he shot toward the nearby mountain range. He waved his hand, and a flying sword screamed out and carved an Immortal’s Cave into the side of the mountain.

With the flick of a sleeve, he flitted like a nightingale into the Immortal’s Cave, where he sat down cross-legged to meditate. His Cultivation base rippled with power, and the heat which spread out from him caused all the moisture in the newly carved cave to instantly disappear.

He spat out the lightning mist, which spread out to cover the entire cave, including the entrance. Then he closed his eyes and circulated his Cultivation base. After the time it takes half an incense to burn, he opened his eyes and slapped his bag of holding. When he lifted his hand up, it was holding the Cubic Pearl.

At first look, it appeared to be square, but upon closer examination, it actually wasn’t. It was very bizarre. Meng Hao looked at the pearl and took a deep breath. His eyes shone with anticipation.

He took out the copper mirror and made a copy. Unfortunately, he didn’t have many Spirit Stones left. After hesitating a moment, he decided not to make any more copies.

“I hope this pearl can dispel the poison of the Resurrection Lily,” he said, eyeing the pearl with glittering eyes. He wasn’t sure exactly how the pearl worked, but he was not the same Cultivator he used to be. He was as

powerful as someone from the late Foundation Establishment stage. Without a moment's hesitation, he cast his Spiritual Sense into the pearl.

After a moment, he frowned, then bit the tip of his tongue and spit out some blood onto the pearl. In the blink of an eye, the pearl absorbed the blood, and then suddenly began to melt.

Strands of white light floated up, along with a delicate, purifying fragrance. Meng Hao's eyes began to shine. After a long moment, he waved his hand, and the Immortal's Cave shook. A crack spread out on the ground, and suddenly a vine burrowed up.

Under Meng Hao's direction, the vine stretched out toward the white strands, and then began to absorb them. The white strands instantly shot toward the vine, entering into its body. Meng Hao watched on, eyes glittering.

After the space of about ten breaths, the vine began to change color. Soon, it was no longer dark red, but pure white. A sense of purity radiated out from it.

More time passed. Meng Hao looked thoughtfully at the slowly melting pearl, and the white strands which floated up from it. His eyes filled with determination, and he began to breathe deeply. The strands flew toward him, entering his body through his mouth and nose.

He closed his eyes, and after about ten breaths had passed, his body began to quiver. Veins bulged on his face, and his eyes snapped open. Within his pupils could be seen the crying-laughing demonic faces. On top of the faces suddenly appeared layer after layer of white strands.

It appeared as if the white strands were attempting to purify the Resurrection Lily within Meng Hao.

Time slipped by. Soon, an hour had passed. Sweat poured off of Meng Hao like rain. His face was pale, but his eyes radiated stubbornness. He took a breath, and more white strands floated into his body through his mouth and nose. As they did, the demonic faces in his pupils began to twist and distort.

Faint screams echoed out in Meng Hao's mind, and his body felt as if it were about to be torn to pieces. There seemed to be a battle of life-and-death going on inside of him. The demonic faces in his eyes were even more twisted. Ghost images appeared, and a black Qi began to pour out of the top of Meng Hao's head. The Qi twisted and coalesced into... a three-colored Resurrection Lily!

The Cubic Pearl seemed about to darken, as if it were going to release the full power of its Qi. It was now half of its original size. It seemed that it would soon have used all of its effectiveness, and the white strands would disappear.

Meng Hao's eyes shined brightly. Without hesitation, he reached out and grabbed the pearl. This time, he didn't breathe in the strands, but actually consumed the entire pearl.

A roaring sound filled his body that seemed to create a harmony with the crashing thunder on the outside. The Resurrection Lily on his head writhed as if it were being buffeted by a powerful wind. Finally, it showed signs of dissipation.

Shrill shrieks filled his head, and his face distorted. However, without hesitation, he lifted up the second Cubic Pearl and, gritting his teeth at the loss of Spirit Stones, made another copy.

After making the second copy, he was now out of Spirit Stones. Eyes radiating stubbornness, he lifted both Cubic Pearls and put them into his mouth.

A shocking, thunderous roar filled Meng Hao as soon as the Cubic Pearls entered his mouth. The roaring was so incredible that it expanded out to fill the surrounding mountains. White strands spread out from Meng Hao's pores, swirling up and surrounding his body.

The three-colored Resurrection Lily on his head suddenly quivered. It seemed to be fading, as if it would completely dissipate at any moment. As Meng Hao sat there surrounded by the white mist, the demonic faces within his eyes emitted constant ghost images, and slowly began to fade away. It seemed the pearl really was capable of dispelling the poison.

After about an hour passed, the image of the Resurrection Lily on the crown of Meng Hao's head was almost completely invisible. There was no trace whatsoever of the demonic faces in his eyes. But then...

Suddenly, the mist which had been dispelling the Resurrection Lily suddenly diffused outward. Next, the white strands began to seethe, congealing above Meng Hao's head. A red streak appeared in their midst, followed by a bright yellow streak, and finally a streak as blue as the sky.

The four colors mixed together within the churning mist, forming together to make... a four-colored Resurrection Lily!

Apparently, the Resurrection Lily couldn't be destroyed. Even as it died, it would reappear as if it had been reincarnated.

An unsightly expression appeared on Meng Hao's face as he observed the four-colored Resurrection Lily. His eyes glimmered darkly, but then suddenly began to shine.

Upon closer inspection, it seemed the four-colored Resurrection Lily, which resembled a demonic face, had a Qi that was not any stronger than the three-colored Resurrection Lily from before. In fact, this new Resurrection Lily was trembling.

"That's not the fourth color!" thought Meng Hao, his eyes narrowing. After thinking back to the four-colored Resurrection Lily he had seen in the Blood Immortal Legacy tournament, he realized that his own Resurrection Lily was different. ²

"If it had actually developed a fourth color, then my consciousness would have been lost, and I would have transformed into a Resurrection Lily. But I don't feel strange at all. Furthermore, the color of this fourth petal...."

Suddenly, the quivering four-colored Resurrection Lily spasmed. Its white petals collapsed into pieces, which then transformed into a white glowing light. The light shot toward the blue petals, and the Resurrection Lily began to tremble even more violently for the space of a few breaths. Meng Hao continued to observe, eyes shining.

He watched as the blue petals began to wither, and then disappear. Now, the Resurrection Lily was composed of only two colors. Upon closer inspection, the blue petals hadn't completely disappeared, but was still barely visible. In fact, it seemed as if they would gradually reappear.

The two-colored Resurrection Lily seemed weaker, yet at the same time emanated a pure Qi. Apparently, after absorbing the Cubic Pearl, the Resurrection Lily had lost one of its colors. Other than that, it seemed like the poison-dispelling power of Cubic Pearl didn't affect the Resurrection Lily at all.

The two-colored Resurrection Lily flickered. Meng Hao was powerless to do anything as it slowly sank back down into him through the top of his head. Its Qi was much weaker, however. Meng Hao stood up. After a moment's hesitation, his eyes filled with resolve.

"The Cubic Pearl was somewhat effective. However, if I want to completely dispel the poison, I have no other choice than to infiltrate the Violet Fate Sect. There, I can search for a method to completely rid myself of it. This thing is really like a bone stuck in my throat!"

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1. The Woodless Larva was last mentioned in Chapter 165.
2. Meng Hao encountered the four-colored Resurrection Lily in Chapter 125 and the chapter after that. It didn't mention the specific colors of the petals, though.

Chapter 206: The Huang Clan Five Immortals ¹

Meng Hao slapped his bag of holding to retrieve the blood-colored mask. He looked at it for a moment. Unless it was absolutely necessary, he didn't want to get tangled up with the meat jelly again.

It had reached a terrifying level in terms of being annoying, which Meng Hao had experienced first hand. After a moment of thought, he reached into the mask with Spiritual Sense.

It was dark inside, and as soon as Meng Hao entered, he sensed the mastiff's Qi. It was growing more and more powerful, causing Meng Hao to feel somewhat calm.

The Blood Mastiff was his most powerful and deadly ally. He couldn't wait for it wake to up and stand at his side like it had when it was a puppy. It would lift its head to the sky and roar.

Next, Meng Hao's Spiritual Sense moved on, pausing for a moment on the flag of three streamers. After a moment, he moved on. It was obviously a precious treasure, but he couldn't do anything with it now.

When his Spiritual Sense reached the Li Clan Patriarch, he stared in shock.

The man was more thin and pallid than ever. He was incredibly weak, and it seemed as if his spirit might collapse at any moment. Despair filled his eyes. Meng Hao suddenly got the feeling that he had underestimated the fearsomeness of the meat jelly.

The meat jelly parrot was currently perched on the shoulder of the Li Clan Patriarch, its eyes glowing as it talked. Every few breaths, the Li Clan Patriarch would shudder.

Meng Hao hesitated, then gritted his teeth and slowly approached. The meat jelly suddenly looked up, having sensed Meng Hao's Spiritual Sense. It cried out.

“Eee? You’re here! Why don’t you join us? The old man and I were just discussing a sunset from seventy thousand years ago. We haven’t finished yet, and he promised to listen until the end.” The meat jelly seemed very excited at the prospect of Meng Hao joining the discussion.

Meng Hao’s heart trembled, but before he could say anything, the Li Clan Patriarch looked over at him. His eyes glistened as if he were looking at a blood relative, and he emitted an excited shout.

It was a shout that seemed to be filled with reckless abandon.

“My name is Li Xuefeng! I’m a Patriarch of the Li Clan from seven thousand years ago. I possessed one of the Divine Watchmen within the Blood Immortal Legacy tournament. I beg you, please take the bird away. I’ll tell you everything. Ask me anything, what do you want to know...? I know techniques from the Li Clan, divine abilities. Whatever you want to do, I can help you. I can tell you anything. Please, take it away, I...”

“Shut your mouth!” said the meat jelly indignantly. “You show no respect for your elders! Am I really so annoying? Y-y-you, you’re too immoral! You’re mine!!” He turned to look solemnly at Meng Hao. “He’s mine! I still haven’t brought him back from the path of wickedness. I still have seventy thousand years of....”

“He’s yours! Yours!” said Meng Hao hurriedly, in a voice which could sever nails and slice iron. Without hesitation he continued, “I guarantee it. He’s definitely yours!”

“Very well, then. You seem to be in a lovely mood, so I won’t permit you to participate in the current discussion. I need to teach a lesson or two to this old man,” it said angrily. “I can’t believe he tried to tattle on me. I hate tattling, it’s very immoral...” It spoke with fury, but excitement filled its eyes. The sudden introduction of a new conversation topic made it very enthusiastic.

Despair filled the face of the Li Clan Patriarch. He gazed pleadingly at Meng Hao, his eyes filled with regret. Why had he insisted on being so arrogant before? If he had just yielded earlier, he would never have been forced to face the torment of this frightening bird.

His life recently had been a living hell, a nightmare worse than death. His entire body suddenly shook.

Meng Hao cleared his throat.

Paying very close attention to his wording, Meng Hao said, "Sir, I was thinking about your ever-changing forms. Soon, Junior will be infiltrating a Sect. Is there any way Senior could possibly lend me some of your power of ever-changing forms?" Even as he spoke, he slowly edged backward.

The meat jelly turned and looked at Meng Hao in surprise.

"What are you going to do? Are you planning some evil deed!?"

"Of course not!" His voice filled with an air of righteousness, Meng Hao said, "You see, there are some extremely wicked people in this Sect. I want to infiltrate them in an attempt to catch the evildoers. Then, Senior can educate them, and help bring them back from the path of wickedness."

The meat jelly suddenly seemed very excited. "Oh, so that's your plan! Very well, very well. Meng Hao, you are really doing the right thing. Such evildoers really must be educated by me... although..." Suddenly it seemed hesitant.

Meng Hao's next words were spoken in a mesmerizing tone. "Sir, how about this: over the next few days, I will go capture some bullies for you to guide and help."

"Oh?!" The meat jelly seemed even more excited, and its hesitation began to wane.

It was time to strike while the iron was hot! "How about two bullies?" said Meng Hao.

The meat jelly quivered and flapped its wings excitedly. However, it still seemed a bit hesitant.

Gritting his teeth, Meng Hao said, "Five bullies! It will take me a few days, but I can go find five bullies for you."

The meat jelly let out a delighted squawk. Its entire body shook, and its eyes shined red with excitement. It stared at Meng Hao, panting. "Bring

me three bullies!!” it cried. It looked at Meng Hao nervously, as if it were worried he would disagree.

“Huh? Three?” Meng Hao stared in shock. At first, he had assumed the meat jelly would try to get even more out of the deal. Instead, it was the opposite.

“Three!” roared the meat jelly. “Bring me three bullies, and I’ll help you. Less than three and the deal’s off!” It seemed it felt it was risking everything in its request.

Meng Hao felt that the whole situation was very strange, but he nodded nonetheless. “Okay, I’ll get you three bullies. Not one less!” With that, he retracted his Spiritual Sense. He took a deep breath as he looked at the blood-colored mask. A strange expression covered his face.

“Could it be that the meat jelly doesn’t know how to count? I offered five, and then it demanded three, and looked like it was going all out....” Mumbling to himself, Meng Hao put the mask away, turned, and left the Immortal’s Cave. The rain had long since ceased. He turned into a white beam of light which shot off into the distance.

Two days later.

On a mountain path walked a muscular man of about thirty years of age. He wore a yellow gown, had small eyes, and a mustache shaped like the character 八. Next to him walked a young man, toward whom he smiled and said, “Junior Brother Meng, it’s not far now. Up ahead is where my older brothers and I reside. Once we’re there, you’ll have to stay for a while. You and I hit it off immediately, didn’t we? We’ll definitely have to become sworn brothers. You know, the Huang Clan Five Immortals are very well-known in these parts. We can really be of some help to you!”

The young man had a bashful expression on his face. His Cultivation base seemed to be at the eighth level of Qi Condensation, one level higher than the yellow-robed Man.

“Thanks, big bro Huang,” the young man said shyly. “This is the first time I ever left the Sect, so I’m very fortunate to have met you.”

“Outside your Sect, you have to rely on friends. It’s really no imposition. My older brothers and I are all very hospitable. Little bro, you’re so young, and yet have such a high Cultivation base. Your future prospects are limitless! I’m sure that you’ll soon be a very famous person in the Southern Domain. You might even be able to outshine Chosen. You know, my older brothers and I think that making friends is very important, and we’re happy to do so.” The yellow-robed man laughed heartily, then slapped Meng Hao on the shoulder. His eyes, however, glittered with contempt and greed. He glanced conspicuously at Meng Hao’s bag of holding.

He had never seen such a bag of holding before; it was obviously something beyond ordinary.

Of course, a man like him would never have a chance to lay eyes on such a bag of holding. This bag was none other than the bag of the Cosmos. And the young man was obviously Meng Hao.

They had run into each other just this morning out in the wild mountains. The instant the man caught sight of the bag of the Cosmos, he had coveted it. But once he saw the level of Meng Hao’s Cultivation base, he gave up any ideas of trying to steal it. Instead, he had engaged in lively smalltalk for quite some time.

The man smiled at Meng Hao and thought, “Some disciple from a Sect I’ve never heard of goes out on his own for the first time. A disciple like that must surely have some life-saving treasures from his Sect. However, someone like this doesn’t have any experience. Only a few flattering words, and I’ve already won him over.” In the man’s mind, he had already figured everything out about his opponent.

Meng Hao looked more bashful than ever. However, in his heart, he was rejoicing. It had only taken him two days to find some local tyrant Cultivators. Even better, the man was leading him to a place where there would surely be more tyrants of the type that the meat jelly would like.

As they chatted, an Immortal’s cave suddenly appeared up ahead of them at the bottom of a mountain. Its sealed main door was enormous,

made from solid limestone. From the look of it, the Immortal's cave must take up half the inside of the mountain. On either side of the main door were two stone guardian lions, extremely lifelike in appearance. They didn't seem to fit in with the surroundings, as if they had been transported here from somewhere else.

There were also two towers near the entrance of the Immortal's Cave. These towers were constructed, not from earth and wood, but from bones. There were bones of both humans and animals, all piled up. It all was very gruesome.

"Here we are, little bro!" said the yellow-robed man, laughing loudly.

Meng Hao frowned. "This place...."

"I know what you're thinking," said the man. He continued, his voice firm: "But we're out in the wilderness. Though we don't cause problems for others, we do have to take some precautionary methods. Decorations like this only serve to frighten off the thieves and miscreants."

Meng Hao didn't respond, but a cold light gleamed in his eyes.

The yellow-robed man didn't notice Meng Hao's look. He waved his sleeve, and a flying sword flew out. He jumped on, and transformed into a colorful beam of light which glided through the air toward the Immortal's Cave.

Meng Hao followed suit, his eyes gleaming coldly.

As the two of them approached the main door of the Immortal's cave, the yellow-robed man waved his sleeve. A bright beam of light shot out, landing on the door. It rumbled, and then slowly began to open up.

Almost as soon as the door began to open, three Cultivators emerged from within. They were all about forty years old, with Cultivation bases at the ninth level of Qi Condensation. Two had fierce bearings, while the other was lean and haggard, with treacherous eyes. He held a fan in hand. He smiled as his gaze swept over Meng Hao.

The yellow-robed man laughed as he landed next to the three others. He turned and looked at Meng Hao, smiling. "Older brothers, I ran into friend

Meng here on the road this morning. This is his first time outside of his sect. I invited him to spend some time with us. Please, join me in welcoming him!”

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1. In this case, Huang is the Chinese character 黄 huáng, which is a common surname, but also means “yellow”.

Chapter 207: This is a Pretty Nice Immortal's Cave

The two large, fierce-looking men eyed Meng Hao for a moment and then smiled. Whichever way you looked at their smiles, they appeared vicious. It was as if they were staring down a helpless little lamb.

The man with the fan seemed to be the most treacherous of the group, and his smile appeared the most sincere. He clasped hands and saluted Meng Hao.

"I, Huang, heard the birds singing earlier, and couldn't help but wonder if a guest would be arriving. Fellow Daoist, a single glance at you and I felt the aura of a hero wash over me. Hearing Fifth brother's words just now, I can tell that you are a dragon among men, venturing out of his Sect for the first time. Fellow Daoist, you are the type of person I revere the most. Please, come into our Immortal's Cave and relax for a moment."

"Well..." said Meng Hao, seemingly unsure of how to respond to such praise. Clapping hands, he bowed back to the man. However, he appeared to be hesitant to enter the cave. Inwardly, he sighed. The man's flattering words were obviously full of lies. Meng Hao could have come up with something much better to say, were he in the other position.

"Little bro," said the yellow-robed man, his eyes flickering, "we're here at the main door. Come come, follow me in. Now that you're here, you're home!" He pulled at Meng Hao's sleeve, dragging him into the Immortal's Cave.

The other men clustered around hesitating Meng Hao as the yellow-robed man graciously led him inside. The limestone door slowly closed behind them. Immediately, the glow of luminescent pearls filled Meng Hao's eyes.

The Immortal's Cave was quite spacious and luxuriously decorated. It was filled with a variety of different rooms, including a pill concocting room and a medicinal plant courtyard.

With a candid laugh, the yellow-robed man made introductions: “Little bro, this is Second Brother, and this is Third Brother. After Fourth Brother, is me the Fifth Brother.” As he made the introductions, he gave a meaningful glance to the treacherous looking man who ranked second.

“Greetings, Fellow Daoists,” said Meng Hao shyly, clasping hands to them. He glanced around, a pleased expression in his eyes. When his gaze fell upon the luminescent pearls, his eyes shined brightly.

“Fellow Daoist Meng, what do you think of our Immortal’s Cave? Not bad, huh?” said Second Brother Huang with a smile, gently fanning himself. His expression was tinged with a disdainful look that he assumed others wouldn’t see, an expression that made it clear he was playing some sort of game. He stared at Meng Hao.

“It’s pretty good,” said Meng Hao, “pretty good. Very complete, with plenty of private rooms. Really, it doesn’t seem common in any aspect.” His praises sounded very sincere. “These luminescent pearls are especially incredible. It seems the spiritual energy here is quite abundant. Don’t tell me you have a Spirit Spring, too?” He asked the question in a very astonished tone.

“There absolutely is a Spirit Spring,” said Second Brother Huang with a laugh. “That’s exactly why the five of us decided to build our Immortal’s Cave here.” The contempt in his eyes grew more obvious. In his mind, Meng Hao was prey trapped in a tiger’s lair.

The Third and Fourth Brothers Huang both gazed at Meng Hao, their hideous grins growing wider. They clearly viewed Meng Hao as a sheep in a wolf’s den!

As for Fifth Brother Huang, he continued to eye the bag of holding strapped to Meng Hao’s waist. His smile grew more brilliant. He obviously thought that today was his lucky day to have snatched up such a cash cow.

Meng Hao also smiled. Although he still looked a bit bashful, his smile was genuine, and quite happy. The Immortal’s Cave really seemed to contain some good opportunities, as did this group of men. They continued to herd him along.

“Eldest Brother recently brought in an artist to paint a portrait of him,” said Second Brother Huang. “It’s not really convenient for him to come out. Fellow Daoist Meng, why don’t we go see him?” Without giving Meng Hao a chance to refuse, he pulled him toward the middle of the Immortal’s Cave, where there was a vast, open area filled with luminescent pearls. At the far end was an enormous throne.

The throne was constructed from crystals, and upon it sat a large man. He appeared to be about fifty years old. He wore a long violet robe, and had a very dignified countenance. Even though he tried, it was impossible to cover up his fierceness. He radiated an intense killing aura.

His Cultivation base was not at the Qi Condensation stage, but the early Foundation Establishment stage!

In front of the large man sat a stooped, withered old man with long white hair. His body trembled and the paintbrush in his hand quivered. The outline of the large man could be seen on the canvas in front of him.

The man’s eyes flashed over the group as they approached. He completely ignored Meng Hao, focusing instead on the yellow-robed man. He gave a cold harrumph.

“If you don’t have something important to do, don’t leave,” he said. “I’ve been jumpy lately, and have a bad feeling. Now that you’re back, sit down. I’ll have this painter do a portrait of all of you.”

Eyes filled with veneration, the yellow-robed man nodded his head in agreement. He stepped forward and sat down next to the violet-robed man. Second Brother Huang and the others clasped hands in respectful salute. Ignoring Meng Hao altogether, they moved forward to sit down.

No one said anything, and soon Meng Hao was standing there alone, an awkward expression on his face.

The large, violet-robed man looked at the painter and said, “You paint some good portraits of us, you hear? If you do, then I won’t cause any trouble for you.” Hearing the man’s cool words, the stooped, white-haired old man shivered and nodded.

“Second Brother, I’ve really been feeling uneasy lately. Don’t forget to check the teleportation portal. If any problems occur, we can get out of here instantly. Third and Fourth Brothers, you two listen well. No going outside!” Each and every word uttered by the violet-robed man caused the others to nod in agreement. None of them paid any attention whatsoever to Meng Hao. He stood there awkwardly. In his opinion, the man should at least greet him. Finally, he gave out a dry cough.

They ignored the cough and continued talking. The violet-robed man didn’t so much as look at him. The others, including the yellow-robed man, didn’t look his way either.

Meng Hao sighed, then coughed a little louder, interrupting the dialogue. Finally, the eyes of the five men fell upon him.

“Who’s this?” said the violet-robed man with a frown, his voice sinister.

“That’s a kid that Fifth Brother picked up when he went out,” said Second Brother Huang, waving his fan. He laughed. “Apparently it’s his first time out of his Sect.”

“This kid is a real idiot,” said the yellow-robed man, laughing. “His bag of holding is clearly incredible, so I chatted him up. Who could have imagined that he would be taken in by my rambling!? I led him right here.”

Hearing this, the violet-robed man looked Meng Hao over, then coolly said, “Hand over your bag of holding.” His expression was one of arrogance; seeing that Meng Hao was at the Qi Condensation stage, he obviously felt that he was virtually beyond notice.

Meng Hao smiled and glanced around. The look in his eye made it seem as if he were looking at his own house. “This is a pretty nice Immortal’s Cave. Why don’t you give it to me? Oh, your throne looks pretty good too, if a bit extravagant. I’ll take that as well.”

The violet-robe man gaped at Meng Hao. The Third and Fourth Huang Brothers, as well as the yellow-robed man, all burst out into arrogant laughter. As it echoed throughout the Immortal’s Cave, Second Brother Huang’s eyes narrowed and filled with a look of concentration.

“Actually, I’ll take all of you along with the Immortal’s Cave,” said Meng Hao. With a chuckle, he began to walk forward. Before he could even take a step, the Third and Fourth Brothers Huang leaped up. They were tall and stalwart, with fierce expressions. Laughing contemptuously, they rushed toward Meng Hao.

“You brat, you dare to speak such nonsense in your Elders’ Immortal’s Cave!? Aren’t you scared!?” They weren’t very far away from Meng Hao, and it took only a moment for them to near him. They were just about to employ some magical techniques when Meng Hao again cleared his throat.

As he did, he completely ignored the two, and took another step forward. When they ran into him, it was like they had slammed into some immovable force. Blood sprayed from their mouths, and their trembling bodies tumbled backward, slamming up against the wall. They coughed up more blood and looked in shock at Meng Hao. Their Cultivation bases were suddenly suppressed, making them little more than mortals.

Everything happened too quickly. Before the others could even react, Meng Hao had reached the crystal throne.

“Are you looking to die!?” cried the yellow-robed man. His body shot forward. Next to him, Second Brother Huang’s eyes flickered, and he waved his hand. A Flame Bird magically appeared, which shot toward Meng Hao. Second Brother Huang himself, however, shot backward in retreat.

All of this takes some time to describe, but actually happened in an instant. Meng Hao didn’t even need to lift his hand. He glanced indifferently at the incoming yellow-robed man. The man’s mind suddenly reeled, and he felt a stabbing pain as some incredible power pulsed in his heart. His vision grew dim, and he began to tremble in despair. The incredible pressure inundated him, and he was powerless to resist it.

Blood shot from his mouth, and he tumbled backward, slamming into the wall. Fear and intense astonishment filled his eyes. His body trembled. The only thing he could think of was the weak, shy expression on Meng

Hao's face when he had met him, that made him look like a helpless animal.

"Who... who are you...?" he said, his heart filling with indescribable dread. How could he possibly have imagined that what he brought into his home was not a helpless lamb, but a vicious wild beast!?

As for Second Brother Huang's Flame Bird, before it could even near Meng Hao, it shook, and then disintegrated. To Meng Hao, a Flame Bird technique such as this was like a child's toy sword.

In the space of an instant, four of the Huang Clan Five Immortals were reduced to a state of shock. The large, violet-robed man still sat on the crystal throne, his face draining of blood. He watched Meng Hao approaching, and his face distorted. With a cry of rage, he leaped up. The instant he did, Meng Hao's gaze fell upon him.

When the gaze entered the violet-robed man's eyes, it hit him like a world-shaking thunderclap. An incredible roaring filled his mind, causing his body to spasm. A feeling of imminent life-or-death crisis washed over him. It was as if this gaze could pierce the world itself, and instantly exterminate him.

"The great circle of Foundation Establishment...." gasped the large man, his voice faint. Disbelief filled his eyes.

Chapter 208: Ask Not The Heavens Regarding Slaying the Flower

Despair and bitterness welled up within the heart of the large, violet-robed man. He immediately lost all will to fight back. Being at early Foundation Establishment, he simply didn't have the courage to attempt to fight with someone of the great circle of Foundation Establishment.

As Meng Hao calmly approached him, he retreated backward several paces. Without hesitation, he clasped hands and saluted.

"Greetings, sir," he said. Then to the others, "Hey you, why haven't you paid respects to the Elder?!" Mumbling and trembling, the Second Brother Huang hurried over and bowed deeply to Meng Hao.

His heart quivered with fear. How could he ever have imagined that what he previously believed to be a weak little lamb could instantly transform into a devilish fiend that could slaughter him hundreds of times over?

Third and Fourth Brothers, as well as the yellow-robed man, immediately joined the violet-robed man. Trembling, the five brothers all bowed repeatedly to Meng Hao.

The most bitter and regretful of all, of course, was the yellow-robed man....

He glanced over at the violet-robed man to find him staring over with an expression of deep, venomous hatred. The yellow-robed man's eyes darkened, and he very nearly fell into a coma out of fright.

Coughing lightly, Meng Hao sat down onto the crystal throne. The five men were now standing where he had been just moments ago....

The old painter stared in frightened awe.

The violet-robed man's heart was filled with anxiety and his scalp was numb. "Sir...." he said. He was just now wrapping his mind around what had happened. His body trembled.

Meng Hao looked at him and said, “I can see that you have some problems with your Cultivation base. You’ve been stuck with only one Dao Pillar for years. How about this: I have a medicinal pill that would be very beneficial.” He lifted up his hand, in the middle of which was a medicinal pill.

It was a very common pill for the Foundation Establishment stage. However, its effectiveness was a bit....

“How many Spirit Stones are you willing to pay for it?” asked Meng Hao coolly.

“Uh....” The violet-robed man gritted his teeth, then pulled out his bag of holding and handed it over to Meng Hao. Meng Hao frowned slightly, causing the trembling violet-robed man to turn and glare ferociously at the four men other behind him. Each and every one was shaking in their boots. One by one, they pulled out all of their belongings. In the end, the violet-robed man procured all of the items and wealth they had saved up over the years in their Immortal’s Cave, as well as the cave itself, and offered it to Meng Hao. All in exchange for one medicinal pill.

His expression the same as ever, Meng Hao collected up the various valuables. Then he glanced at the yellow-robed man, who looked back sullenly, and then the Second Brother Huang.

“I heard you mention there’s a teleportation portal here?”

“Yes, yes there is,” replied Second Brother Huang. Not daring to leave out any information, he quickly gave a full description: “Actually, we didn’t bring the portal here; it’s a natural function of the Immortal’s Cave, which we accidentally discovered. It works, but it will only teleport to one fixed location.” His heart was filled with virtual agony, as well as complete enmity for the yellow-robed man. “Dammit, Fifth Brother,” he thought, “who is this that you brought back with you? He’s some kind of Patriarch!!”

Meng Hao nodded. He had already used his Spiritual Sense to confirm the location of the teleportation portal. Looking back at the five men, he suddenly waved his arm. Unable to resist, the five of them were instantly

swept up. All they could see was a blur as they entered the world of the blood-colored mask which lay inside Meng Hao's bag of the Cosmos.

Everything was the color of blood. The meat jelly was in the midst of educating the Li Clan Patriarch, who sat there, emaciated, a blank, agonized look in his eyes. He looked more dead than alive, his body slack.

The meat jelly immediately noticed Meng Hao appear with the five Huang Clan men. Its eyes filled with excitement, and he instantly cast aside the Li Clan Patriarch.

"Bullies!" he cried, flying over. "I smell bullies! They're all bullies, all immoral!!" It flew a few circles around the five Huang Clansmen, who were clearly disoriented and terrified. The meat jelly was getting more excited.

Meng Hao cleared his throat and said, "Sir, these are the bullies I promised to bring you a few days ago. They need education from you to bring them back from the path of wickedness."

"Excellent, excellent," said the meat jelly with a nod. "You kept your word, as shall I. First, let me count." It flapped its wings as it settled onto the shoulder of the large, violet-robed man.

"One... two... three..." The meat jelly began to count, starting with the violet-robed man and the proceeding onto the Second and Third Brothers. When its eyes fell upon the Fourth Brother, it suddenly stared in shock. "One... two?" It flapped its wings as it reached the yellow-robed man. Suddenly, an angry, humiliated expression appeared on its face. It spun and glared at Meng Hao. "Liar!!"

Meng Hao gaped at the meat jelly.

"Look!" roared the meat jelly furiously. "One, two, three, one, two!! You've brought me two bullies, and I asked for three! I wanted three bullies!!" It clearly believed itself to have been swindled.

Meng Hao stared with wide eyes. Suddenly, everything became clear. This damned meat jelly really could only count the numbers one, two and three?

Without hesitation, Meng Hao quickly swept up the yellow-robed man as well as the Fourth Brother. Instantly, they disappeared.

“That was just a little mistake,” said Meng Hao quickly. “Why don’t you count again?”

The meat jelly carefully began to count again. “One, two, three... Haha! There are three! Three bullies. Excellent, excellent.” Excited once again, it beat its wings and flew around in a few more circles. Suddenly, a glow like lightning shot out from it toward Meng Hao.

Meng Hao didn’t evade. The lightning glow slammed into him, melding with his Spiritual Sense.

“This is my will of lightning,” said the meat jelly, which had already landed on the shoulder of the violet-robed man. “You can use it to change forms one time. Make sure to bring back some more bullies!” It looked at the violet-robed man with a friendly expression. “Hey. Hello. My name is Ultimate Vexation. What’s your name?”

The large, violet-robed man stared in shock. Not waiting for him to reply, Meng Hao quickly left the blood-colored mask. He could only imagine what would happen after the man responded. A sea of suffering awaited him....

Back in the Immortal’s Cave, Meng Hao sat there, a thoughtful expression on his face.

“The meat jelly can only count from one to three.... Very useful.” After a moment, he looked over at the old painter, who sat there with a dull expression on his face.

“Sir,” he said softly, “what village are you from? I can take you back home.”

The man looked scared. He hesitated for a moment, then said in a trembling voice, “But... my painting isn’t finished yet. Do you mind if I paint you?” His eyes shined with anticipation.

Meng Hao was shocked for a moment. Then his eyes narrowed, and he looked closely at the old man. No matter which way he looked at him, the

man seemed mortal. After a while, Meng Hao nodded. "Thank you so much, sir," he said, continuing to sit there on the crystal throne.

The old man took a deep breath, and then lifted the paintbrush, hand trembling. Looking at Meng Hao, he began to paint.

Time passed slowly. It took about four hours, during which time Meng Hao waited patiently. The man painted earnestly, and Meng Hao sat without moving.

After a while, the old man put down his paintbrush. He eyed the painting in front of him, and a satisfied expression filled his eyes. He looked up at Meng Hao and smiled.

"Finished," he said. "Why don't you take a look? Does it look like you?" His face was filled with anticipation.

Meng Hao smiled. He stood up and walked over to stand next to the old man. What he saw on the canvas was a young man sitting upright in a chair, surrounded by mountains. You couldn't say that the painting wasn't good, but there was something about it that just didn't seem right. It only bore a thirty percent resemblance to Meng Hao.

"Very good," said Meng Hao, smiling and nodding his head. "What are these two marks here?" He lifted his hand to point at the painting, where two long, thick marks could be seen. Meng Hao wasn't sure what they meant.

"What's above all of us?" asked the old man, smiling.

Meng Hao looked at him in surprise. Then, he smiled. "The sky," he said quietly.

"Think about it for a moment," said the old man, gazing at Meng Hao. His smile seems to contain some sort of hidden meaning. He looked completely different than he had just moments ago. Meng Hao thought for a moment, and then looked up. His eyes glittered as his vision passed through the Immortal's Cave to look up at the sky outside.

After some time passed, Meng Hao lowered his head. The instant he did, his pupils constricted. The old man... was nowhere to be seen!

An archaic voiced suddenly filled the Immortal's Cave, causing Meng Hao's body to quiver. His Spiritual Sense suddenly scattered. "Because of the ten thousand year old will of the World Tree, my residual self is here today. It is fate that I came here today to paint for you. I have sealed the true form of the Resurrection Lily, refined its nature talent and fused it with your spirit. While it is sealed, it cannot harm you. Furthermore, you will be able to draw upon the Resurrection Lily's nature talent of plants and vegetation. When enough time passes, you can cast away my residual will which seals the flower. Only one person exists in my ten thousand years of memory. Because of Karma, he who exists in my memory, cannot be slain by Ji!"

A long moment passed before Meng Hao took a deep breath. His eyes shone brightly as he turned once again to look at the painting. He gasped and stared in shock.

The image on the painting was not that of Meng Hao, but of a... Resurrection Lily!

It looked savage, unwilling, and even insane. It appeared to be sealed inside the painting! The image was incredibly lifelike!

There were also some words written on the painting.

The day the Resurrection Lily blooms with seven colors, the flower will become an Immortal in a thousand years. Karma is hidden in the Immortal Mountain. Ask not the Heavens regarding the path to slaying the flower.

Painted in the Southern Domain, Southern Heaven Star, for my young friend.

Shui Dongliu.¹

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1. Shui Dongliu was previously mentioned in [Chapter 194](#) and [Chapter 197](#).

Chapter 209: Opportunity for a Secret Meeting

Meng Hao took a deep breath. He lifted his head and was lost in thought for some time. Within his mind swirled images from that day within the cloud vortex in the Song Clan. When he'd stood on the enormous tree looking out into the emptiness, he'd seen words written and signed by Shui Dongliu!

A long moment passed. Finally, Meng Hao sat down cross-legged on the ground to examine himself. After enough time passed for an incense stick to burn, he opened his eyes, which shone brightly. It was clear to him that the Resurrection Lily had been completely repressed by some intangible force. It seemed to be asleep, sealed.

This effect was much more powerful than that of the Spring and Autumn tree, and would give him much more time to completely dispel the poison. Taking a deep breath he carefully rolled up the painting, and then clasped hands and bowed deeply for the old man.

"Many thanks for your assistance, Elder," he said, holding his bow for the space of ten breaths before straightening. He had no idea why this old man had appeared, or why he had been waiting, seemingly for Meng Hao himself.

"Shui Dongliu...." After another moment, Meng Hao turned and headed to examine all of the secret rooms in the Immortal's Cave. Everything that he could take with him, he packed away. Afterward, he went to the teleportation portal. Although he hadn't studied teleportation portals very much in the past, he had used them several times. He pulled out a spirit stone and placed it into the middle of the portal. Gleaming light shined out, and soon, the glow of teleportation surrounded Meng Hao.

A droning sound filled the air, shaking the entire mountain. The light flashed blindingly, and then disappeared. Meng Hao also disappeared without a trace.

Southern Domain. State of Eastern Emergence, Violet Fate Sect territory. In the middle of the remote mountains was a towering peak, carved into which was an Immortal's Cave. A radiant, glittering light appeared and then slowly vanished. Meng Hao immediately walked out.

He looked back at the abandoned Immortal's cave and the run-down teleportation portal. Not sure whether he would need to use it again one day, he committed its location to memory, then disappeared into a beam of prismatic light.

As he flew along, a rippling glow suddenly spread out in layers over his body. When it faded, his appearance had completely changed. His skin was no longer dark, but rather fair and clear. He looked much younger, perhaps sixteen or seventeen years old, and emanated a completely scholarly and refined air. He looked completely different, even somewhat soft and immature.

"I bet all the Sects and Clans in the Southern Domain are looking for me, thanks to the Sublime Spirit Scripture incident. But now, I can infiltrate the Violet Fate Sect. Be it with the goal of dispelling my poison, learning alchemy, or to master Violet Qi from the East... I absolutely must join this great Sect." His eyes filled with resolve.

Several days later, outside the Violet Fate Sect, in a city of Cultivators.

Violet Moon was a flourishing, bustling city, a hub of activity for Cultivators in the State of Eastern Emergence. This was especially true in the seventh month of the year, when the Violet Fate Sect held its yearly Pill Auction. During that time, the city usually was filled with even more Cultivators than usual. It wasn't just the Sects of the State of Eastern Emergence that would come, but Sects from throughout the Southern Domain. Many would teleport here just to attend the Pill Auction.

The so-called Pill Auction was a massive convention hosted by the Violet Fate Sect to auction off medicinal pills. Master alchemists from the Violet Fate Sect would offer up their best medicinal pills. Not only would they make tidy profits, but it allowed them to show off their pill concocting talent to the rest of the world.

During the Pill Auction, even the Furnace Lords of the Violet Fate Sect would sometimes participate. When that happened, it would always cause quite a stir, and attract the attention of other great Sects.

After all, Furnace Lords from the Violet Fate Sect were different than normal master alchemists. Other Sects wouldn't be able to raise up a single one, no matter how high of a price they paid. In the entire Southern Domain, only the Violet Fate Sect could train Furnace Lords.

Half the reason the Violet Fate Sect could become one of the great Sects of the Southern Domain, was because of its alchemists. The other reason was the fragment of the Sublime Spirit Scripture which gave them the Violet Qi from the East technique.

Because of this, the Violet Fate Sect was structured into two divisions. One part of the Sect was made up by the Violet Qi Division, the other part of the Sect was made up of the East Pill Division!

The Violet Qi Division practiced Cultivation related to the Dao of magical techniques. The East Pill Division was devoted to the Dao of alchemy. The two divisions both complemented and respected each other. Because of this relationship, the Violet Fate Sect occupied its current position.

This year's Violet Fate Sect Pill Auction would take place in only a few days, within Violet Moon City. Currently, a young scholar of about sixteen to seventeen years old stood in the public square in the city center, gazing off into the distance at a mountain. The mountain glowed with a violet light that rose up to the heavens. It turned the entire sky a violet color, and from a distance, it didn't appear to be a mountain but actually... a colossal mountain-sized statue!

The statue depicted an old man. In front of the old man was a pill furnace shaped somewhat like a mountain, as well as an enormous scroll, both of which emanated violet-colored light. With a mere glance, anyone could tell that this place was anything but ordinary.

This was the main gate of the Violet Fate Sect!

Next to the young scholar was a skinny, middle-aged man of about thirty

years of age, with shifty eyes. He sighed emotionally and said, "That's the Founder of the Violet Fate Sect. His Daoist name was Reverend Violet East. He's long since achieved Immortality. However, the Daoist doctrines he left behind have been built upon down until this very day. They became the foundation upon which was built one of the five great Sects of the Southern Domain, the Violet Fate Sect."

His eyes filled with veneration, he continued, "Later generations remembered his countenance and, using a mountain as the base, carved out that statue. The pill furnace in front of him represents the East Pill Division of the Violet Fate Sect. The scroll represents the Violet Qi Division. Together, they form the majestic main gate of the Violet Fate Sect. Beyond that gate are endless mountains, all connected with suspension bridges. It forms an amazing sight that outsiders aren't able to gaze upon. That, is the Violet Fate Sect."

The young scholar seemed to be completely wrapped up in the man's words. However, deep in his eyes existed a cold light.

Naturally, this young scholar was none other than Meng Hao, with his new appearance. The skinny man next to him was a guide he'd found who helped strangers familiarize themselves with the city.

"If only I could join a great Sect like this, then I would be able to live without regrets," Meng Hao said softly, gazing at the majestic main gate. His words were filled with longing.

"That's pretty much impossible," laughed the skinny man. "The Violet Fate Sect rarely recruits new disciples. Even when they do, it's usually only from the Sects and Cultivator Clans within the State of Eastern Emergence. They almost never accept outsiders. If they did, the State of Eastern Emergence would be filled with people dreaming of joining. Young friend, it's still early. What sort of things are you interested in buying, I can take you to find them?"

"There's no need, I already found what I was looking for." Meng Hao laughed, then took out a Spirit Stone and handed it to the skinny man. He gave him a slight bow and then walked out of the square.

The skinny man stared at him in surprise for a moment, and then pocketed the Spirit Stone. He had led the young man around all morning, showing him all around the city but not taking him to any markets whatsoever. Putting the matter aside, he walked off. There was still a whole afternoon in which to find other customers.

Meng Hao traversed the streets surrounding the public square. Halfway down one block, he suddenly stopped and glanced over at a nearby store. It was a medicinal pill shop. On the wall inside the shop, he could see some old, dried up medicinal pills, arranged to form the outline of a pill furnace. In the middle of the image of the pill furnace was an elliptical symbol.

Within the symbol were four dried up medicinal pills.

Nothing about it looked out of the ordinary or unique. However, after catching sight of it, a smile broke out on Meng Hao's face. He walked around the corner into an alley. When he emerged, he was wearing a wide, bamboo hat and a long robe. He strode directly into the medicinal pill shop.

The shop wasn't large. Other than the shopkeeper, there was no one else inside.

"I want one of these pills," said Meng Hao, pointing to one of the low-priced pills on the shelf.

The shopkeeper opened his eyes and glanced at Meng Hao, then pulled out one of the pills Meng Hao had pointed to.

"This pill is useful during the fifth level of Qi Condensation. It costs seventeen Spirit Stones."

Meng Hao grabbed the pill without even looking at it, and with the flick of a sleeve, sent it shooting toward the image on the wall. It immediately smashed into the middle of the elliptical symbol. Now, instead of four pills, there were five.

With that, he tossed some Spirit Stones to the shopkeeper and then left.

The shopkeeper watched all of this in surprise. Then his eyes began to

glitter, and he clasped hands and bowed toward Meng Hao's back as he walked off.

Time passed. Meng Hao had been staying in Violet Moon City for two days. On the same day that the Violet Fate Sect Pill auction started, he was sitting there cross-legged in the night when suddenly he opened his eyes and retrieved a jade slip from his bag of holding. It was glowing brightly.

This particular jade slip was an invitation medallion to a secret meeting! Recorded in the jade slip was a map, marked with the same symbol that was on the wall of the shop he'd visited earlier.

Outside, the moon was rising. Meng Hao put away the jade slip, and then left.

Soon, he appeared outside the same shop as before, wearing a wide bamboo hat, and voluminous robes. Without hesitation, he walked up and knocked on the wooden door.

After three knocks, the door slowly swung open. Inside was a nothing but pitch black.

His eyes flickered. After a moment's examination, he walked in. Ripples flowed out across the surface of the blackness, as if it were water. Meng Hao saw a bright glow, and then he was in a different place. Up ahead of him was a princely palace.

This palace looked exactly the same as the place he had visited the first time he went to one of these secret meetings. An old man, hands crossed and folded up within his sleeves, stood outside the palace. He looked Meng Hao over wordlessly.

Meng Hao approached, pulling out the secret meeting invitation medallion. The old man lowered his head, and Meng Hao walked past him into the palace.

He could hear the sounds of singing and dancing coming from further inside, just like the last time. Beyond some ornamental rock displays was a pavilion, within which sat four Cultivators. All of them wore masks covering their faces, making it impossible to see who they were.

Chapter 210: Joining the Violet Fate Sect

Meng Hao stepped into the pavilion calmly. He didn't look at the four others, nor did they look at him. He sat down off to the side.

Not much time passed before three more people arrived. They were surrounded by the sound of singing, and yet no dancers could be seen. It created a truly bizarre air. Suddenly, contented laughter rang out as a ruddy-faced old man appeared and strode toward them. He sat down in the seat of honor.

"Ladies and Gentlemen, let today's secret meeting begin. I won't go into all the rules. I'm sure this is not your first time participating as guests in a secret meeting, Fellow Daoists, so let's get going." He flicked his sleeve, and a Nine Dragons Furnace appeared in the middle of all the participants. Mist began to spread out, and Meng Hao glanced at the old man.

This man was clearly not the same old man Meng Hao had seen at his first secret meeting. However, Meng Hao's Cultivation base was not the same as it had been at that time. With his Spiritual Sense, he could tell that the old man wasn't even real.

He was actually a projection!

"These secret meetings are really mysterious," Meng Hao thought. "There must be some powerful forces behind the scenes that organize them. The meeting back in the Black Sieve Sect territory was exactly the same as this one." He pulled out a jade slip, which he sent into the furnace.

All the other participants did the same, and soon the mist from the dragon furnace filled the area, enveloping everyone.

Glowing lights began to appear, which Meng Hao started to browse through. His eyes began to flicker. The vast majority of the offerings were for pill formulas and medicinal plants.

"There must be at least one person from the East Pill Division here

today, and not just a master alchemist, but a Furnace Lord.” In the past few days, Meng Hao had made a few inquiries about the East Pill Division, and now knew much more about it.

For example, disciples of the East Pill Division started out as apprentice alchemists. Eventually, they could become master alchemists, then Furnace Lords. Higher than the Furnace Lords were the Violet Furnace Lords, who were very important figures within the Southern Domain.

Violet Furnace Lords were automatically novitiates of Grandmaster Pill Demon, and thus could receive direct instruction from him. The only other way to become a novitiate of Grandmaster Pill Demon was to have special backing, and thus reach heaven in a single bound, so to speak.

For example, Ding Xin from all those years ago, had been a disciple of the Violet Qi Division. However, his gift for pill concoction impressed Grandmaster Pill Demon, and he eventually was selected to become a novitiate. Sadly, before he could even begin his studies, he had been sent to the State of Zhao and had fallen at the hands of Meng Hao.¹

After that, the only disciple Grandmaster Pill Demon had accepted to be a novitiate was Chu Yuyan. However, her skill in pill concocting was actually only at the level of a Furnace Lord. She was still quite a distance from Violet Furnace Lord.

Meng Hao sat there thoughtfully, looking over the various twinkling dots of light. After a while, he reached out to grab the glowing dot that contained his information. He quickly imprinted it with some more details and then threw it back out to wait.

Not too much time passed before a streak of light appeared in front of him.

“You have a friend who wants to join the Violet Fate Sect’s East Pill Division and become an apprentice alchemist? You’ll need a recommendation for that. What do you have to trade?”

Meng Hao’s eyes glittered. This was the exact purpose for which he had chosen to attend the Violet Moon City secret meeting.

According to the rules of the Violet Fate Sect, it was impossible to just randomly join the Sect. However, the larger a Sect is, the more dragons and snakes will be jumbled together ². Of course there would be some people who would break the rules out of self-interest. And apparently this secret meeting had a Furnace Lord in attendance, most likely because of the recent Pill Auction.

If medicinal herbs could be sold for profit, then why not a spot in the Sect for an apprentice alchemist? After all, in the Violet Fate Sect, there were roughly one hundred thousand apprentice alchemists. One spot didn't really count for anything.

Meng Hao didn't respond immediately. He waited for about the time it takes two incense sticks to burn. No more responses to his request came in, so he began to negotiate with the person who had just messaged him. They felt each other out to confirm each other's legitimacy. Meng Hao was familiar with this process.

It didn't take long for the two of them to reach an agreement. Meng Hao traded some of the medicinal plants he had acquired in Patriarch Reliance's Immortal's Cave in exchange for a spot as an apprentice alchemist. When the deal was completed, Meng Hao had a new jade slip in his hand.

It was dark green, and the image of a pill furnace was carved on its surface.

Soon, the secret meeting came to an end. The mist dissipated, and one by one, the various participants disappeared into beams of light. When Meng Hao passed through the glowing exit, he found himself in a remote corner of Violet Moon City. He lowered his head and promptly disappeared into the night.

Three days later, at the foot of the Violet Fate Sect, Meng Hao appeared, still looking like the sixteen or seventeen year old scholar. He had a nervous expression on his face as he respectfully handed the dark green jade slip over to a stout middle-aged man.

The man wore a Daoist robe and had a thin beard. He appeared to be at

the eighth level of Qi Condensation. He glanced at Meng Hao and then looked over the jade slip.

“Since you have this jade slip of recommendation, you may join the Violet Fate Sect as an apprentice alchemist. However, all apprentice alchemists must cross the Pass of Truth. Including yourself, there are three people here today who wish to join the Sect. If any of you harbor sinister intentions, then you will meet your death on the Bridge of Truth.” He flicked his sleeve and began to walk.

Meng Hao followed him along the foot of the mountain, the one that was shaped like a pill furnace. Up above was the imposing statue of Reverend Violet East. Meng Hao and the middle-aged man walked for some time, until they were about halfway up the mountain. Up ahead was a chain bridge, which swayed lightly back and forth. Clouds drifted about above and below, making the image of Reverend Violet East just barely visible. Behind the giant statue was the peak of a mountain, surrounded by curling mists and clouds.

Beneath the bridge was a deep abyss. Falling into the abyss meant sure death for anyone who couldn't use their Cultivation base.

Not far from the chain bridge stood a Cultivator of about thirty years of age, with a blank expression on his face. Behind him were two youths, one boy and one girl, who cast nervous glances at the chain bridge. Clearly, they were so frightened that their scalps had gone numb.

The stout Cultivator led Meng Hao up to them and then yawned.

“The three of you must cross the bridge,” he said. “If no duplicity exists in your heart, then you will reach the other side safely. With that, you will be a Violet Fate Sect apprentice alchemist. However, if you do harbor duplicity, then you will die. Throughout the years, many youths have perished before reaching the other side.” Having finished his speech, the man completely ignored Meng Hao and the others.

The expressionless Cultivator closed his eyes.

Meng Hao looked over at the chain bridge. Without hesitation, he walked forward toward it. Behind him, the young man gritted his teeth and

followed.

As soon as Meng Hao stepped foot onto the bridge, it began to sway back and forth. He took a deep breath as he walked away from the pill furnace mountain. About half way, a strong wind picked up, whistling past and causing the bridge to sway even harder. At the same time, a soft sigh could be heard. The sound of it pierced into Meng Hao's ears and sent his mind reeling.

Distracting thoughts suddenly filled his head. They contained information about the various reasons he wanted to join the Violet Fate Sect. They bubbled up, beyond his control, as if at the moment anyone could read his thoughts.

At this exact moment, however, the Qi which powered the meat jelly's transformation ability suddenly rose up. It immediately pushed down the distracting thoughts. Suddenly, Meng Hao felt an invisible gaze descending upon him from the statue of Reverend Violet East, inspecting him.

His heart trembled. As the other distracting thoughts were pushed down, he tried hard to continue thinking about his desire to study pill concocting as well as his yearning to join the Violet Fate Sect.

The invisible gaze swept over Meng Hao for the space of about ten breaths. Then, it moved on to the two young people behind him.

Meng Hao continued on, his face pale. Behind him, a scream rang out. Nothing had happened to the young woman, but the young man suddenly fell off of the chain bridge, plummeting down.

Suddenly, the power of early Foundation Establishment erupted out from the young man. As soon as it did, though, his body suddenly trembled. A look of fear shone in his eyes as his Cultivation base suddenly vanished. Like nothing more than a mortal, he fell down into the abyss.

Meng Hao sucked in a deep breath. With an expression of both determination and fear, he continued on, clenching his jaw. The gaze swept over him a total of nine times. Each time, it stayed on him longer and longer. Finally, he reached the statue of Reverend Violet East. He

stepped onto the mountain that formed the main gate of the Violet Fate Sect. He had succeeded.

There in front of him was an old man wearing a black gown. A thick aroma of medicinal plants wafted off of him.

He looked coolly at Meng Hao for a moment, and then nodded. Generally speaking, people could not cross the Bridge of Truth if they harbored secret motives. The chain bridge seemed ordinary in nature. However, it was a method that the East Pill Division had used for years to test disciples. If they passed the test, then they could join the Sect.

“State your name.”

“Fang Mu,” replied Meng Hao, nervously clasping his hands. ³

“I am the honor guard of the East Pill Division’s herb district, Xu Chen,” said the old man coolly. “I also supervise new apprentice alchemists. You’re lucky to be able to join the Violet Fate Sect’s East Pill Division. Apprentice alchemists are the foundation of the East Pill Division. Every single Furnace Lord was promoted from the ranks of the master alchemists, who of course all start out as apprentice alchemists. In the future, perhaps you will become an esteemed Furnace Lord. That will depend on your luck and latent talent.”

The young woman finally approached from the bridge. She trembled as she stood next to Meng Hao. Her face was pale white.

“Let’s go. Having reached this point, you can now call this Sect your home.” The old man smiled kindly, and then flicked his sleeve. A gentle wind picked up Meng Hao and the young woman as the old man flew off with them to another location.

Winding paths snaked through the surrounding mountains as they flew along. Looking around, Meng Hao could only see endless chains of mountains, as well as countless valleys filled with richly ornamented buildings. The whole scene looked celestial in nature.

“This place...” thought Meng Hao, “Is the Sect where Fang Mu will reside for a very long time....” His eyes shined brightly as he looked at all the

sights.

Then suddenly, a strange expression filled his eyes. He had just noticed that in one valley was an empty space between the buildings. Stabbed into the side of the mountain there was an iron spear.

That iron spear looked very familiar....

*

1. Ding Xin made his appearance in chapter 64 , and was eventually killed in chapter 67.
2. This expression means that good and bad people will be mixed up together.
3. Fang Mu in Chinese is 方木 fāng mù – Fang is a surname, although the character has multiple meanings, some of which are “square” and “direction.” Mu means “wood” or “tree”.

Chapter 211: A Despicable Name

Soon, the old man brought Meng Hao and the young woman to their destination. It was a very large mountain valley, filled with a variety of buildings. Off in the distance were areas devoted to growing medicinal plants. As soon as they arrived, Meng Hao could smell a fragrant aroma wafting through the air.

There were many young people in the valley, all of whom wore short, light yellow garments. Some were picking medicinal plants and others were lost in thought as they studied jade slips. Some sat beneath the evening sunshine, staring at medicinal plants which they held in their hands. The plants swayed back and forth in a very bizarre fashion.

After landing, the old man flicked his sleeve and cried, “Bai Yunlai!”¹ The young people nearby all looked up. Catching sight of the old man, their faces filled with respect, and they saluted with clasped hands.

An average-sized young man ran out of one of the buildings and approached them. He looked to be about thirty years of age.

“Master Xu, sir, I’m here,” he said in a flattering tone. “What orders do you have? I can help you with absolutely anything.”

The old man glared at him. “These are two new apprentice alchemists who just joined the Sect. Explain things to them and then take them to get their medallions.” With that, the old man turned to look at Meng Hao and the young woman. He nodded encouragingly, then transforming into a beam of light and shot away.

Now that the old man was gone, the surrounding youths ignored Meng Hao and the others and continued on with their various activities. They didn’t seem to have any good or bad will toward Meng Hao whatsoever. Their expressions were calm and even.

Meng Hao was going to have to get used to being in a Sect like this. Life in the Reliance Sect had been very different. This was now the second Sect he had joined. He sighed inwardly.

The young woman next to him clasped hands toward Bai Yunlai and said, "Greetings, Elder Brother Bai."

"Hey, no Elders here, and no need for saluting." Bai Yunlai laughed heartily, looking back and forth between Meng Hao and the young woman. "You two came just at the right time. Most of the apprentice alchemists in the Sect have been very busy with the Pill Auction. There aren't very many people left behind. Alright, you two don't worry. With Old Bai here, you'll quickly get into the swing of things. Come come. Let's walk around a bit, and I'll introduce the place to you." After asking their names, Bai Yunlai led the way as they began to walk around.

"If you want a description of the Violet Fate Sect's East Pill Division, well, that's a massive topic. There are no less than a hundred valleys just like this one. Each one is home to nearly a thousand apprentice alchemists. Most of our time is spent growing medicinal plants, memorizing the names of various medicines, and occasionally harvesting the plants. Do you know who the most tired people in the whole Southern Domain are? Us Violet Fate Sect apprentice alchemists, that's who!

"One hundred thousand apprentice alchemists, each with their own work to do. Actually, we have to participate in all the different activities. We need to memorize the names of over one hundred thousand medicinal plants, we have to care for the growing plants, plus we have to find time to practice Cultivation. If we didn't do that, then we wouldn't be able to catalyze the plants into growth. As for you two, well, you'll figure everything out eventually.

"Us apprentice alchemists are real peons. Only if you stick out like an awl poking through a sack, and distinguish yourself in some way, can you possibly become a master alchemist and study true alchemy. Then Inner Sect disciples will come looking for you to concoct pills. According to Sect rules, they have to provide compensation to us when we concoct pills for them. It's always a good day when that happens.

"Too bad there are one hundred thousand apprentice alchemists. How many do you think become master alchemists? There are only a thousand in the entire Sect! It's so difficult!"

Bai Yunlai spoke very quickly as he led Meng Hao and the young woman through various valleys.

“See here? This is one of the places where only master alchemists can go. We aren’t allowed in....” They continued on. “This area belongs to the Violet Qi Division, although it’s not the Inner Sect, just the Outer Sect.” Bai Yunlai had led the two of them to one of the valleys toward the front of the Sect. Here were congregated quite a few Cultivators of the Violet Qi Division. Courteous expressions appeared on their faces when they saw Bai Yunlai. It seemed he was a relatively influential person within the Sect.

Meng Hao cleared his throat and then said some flattering things to Bai Yunlai, who instantly looked very happy and said, “You know, I know almost everything about the Sect, and there aren’t many things I can’t take care of. Junior Brother Fang, if you ever have any problems in the future, you just come look for me and I’ll take care of everything for you.”

Suddenly, Bai Yunlai stopped in his tracks. He pointed up toward the center of the valley, where an iron spear was stabbed into the side of the mountain. The spear was bent, and having been exposed to the wind and rain, was covered in rust.

Bai Yunlai looked around, then lowered his voice and said, “Do you see that iron spear? There’s a story behind it.”

A strange expression appeared on Meng Hao’s face. He had noticed this valley when they’d flown past earlier. He looked up at the spear, coughing slightly, and feigning extreme interest.

“Do you know who put that spear there? It was Wu Dingqiu of the senior generation. They say that ten years ago, on a dark and stormy night, Elder Wu returned to the Sect in a foul rage, with that spear in his hand. He threw it with all his might, and it landed right there!

“According to the rumors from that year, he wanted all the Outer Sect disciples to remember the shame caused by that spear. He said, ‘You fools are always stupid to the point of death! If you keep being this stupid, you really will die one day!’” Bai Yunlai’s voice was very quiet as he spoke, and yet extremely vivid. The young woman’s eyes went wide as she listened.

Meng Hao spontaneously gave another light cough.

“Where did the spear come from?” asked the young woman.

“Where did it come from? Heh heh. You might not believe it. According to the legend, ten years ago, a group of Outer Sect disciples participated in an Outer Sect promotion test. It was held in an extremely dangerous location, where they met a vile creature of a man. That guy ended up selling the iron spear to the two strongest of the disciples!

“The price they paid reduced them to poverty and ruin. They even borrowed Spirit Stones from fellow disciples to pay for it. They thought it was a precious treasure, which was why they bought it. Ai, it wasn’t until a few years ago that they finally paid back all the Spirit Stones. Anyway, when Wu Dingqiu heard what happened he felt it was an utter humiliation. And he was the leader of the group! What do you two think, was that man despicable or what?” 2

The young woman had been listening with wide eyes and gaping mouth. She looked up at the iron spear, which looked in all respects to be completely normal. She couldn’t understand why the two strongest of the disciples would waste so much money on it.

Meng Hao felt a little guilty. Then he noticed that Bai Yunlai was looking at him, so he nodded and solemnly said, “That fellow is definitely matchlessly despicable. It’s enough to make one’s hair bristle with anger!” Actually, after meeting Qian Shuihen and Lu Song back in the Song Clan, he had guessed that the matter from that year had had a profoundly negative effect on the two of them, which continued on down to this day.

What he had never imagined was that it actually affected the entire Violet Fate Sect. Suddenly, he felt a bit sorry for Qian Shuihen and Lu Song. And now he understood why they had been gnashing their teeth with fury back at the Song Clan.

Bai Yunlai sighed and shook his head. “The spear is here as a reminder to all Violet Fate Outer Sect disciples. They are never to forget this matter....”

“Who was the person who sold them the spear?” asked the young woman, her curiosity piqued.

“His name is Meng Hao,” said Bai Yunlai quietly. “Have you heard of him? Recently, everybody in the Southern Domain has been talking about him. At the Song Clan search for a son-in-law, he revealed himself as the successor of the Sublime Spirit Scripture. He’s the same person who was involved in that scandal with Chu Yuyan.”

“Meng Hao?” said the young woman, gaping.

“Quiet!” said Bai Yunlai quickly. “That name is taboo in the Violet Fate Sect! No one dares to speak it aloud...”

Meng Hao stood off to the side, feeling even more guilty. He continued to clear his throat. He suddenly had the feeling that coming to the Violet Fate Sect might not have been the best decision.

It was at this time that his facial expression suddenly flickered. He had just caught sight of a beam of light approaching from the distance. It transformed into a grim-faced young man who stared ferociously at Bai Yunlai. This was none other than... Qian Shuihen.

“Bai Yunlai, what are you doing sticking around here?! Why haven’t you moved on?!”

Bai Yunlai suddenly shivered, and a flattering expression appeared on his face.

“Elder Brother Qian, I’m just showing these two apprentice alchemists around the Sect. We were just leaving, just leaving.” With that he grabbed Meng Hao and the young woman and hurriedly led them away.

“Did you see? That was one of the two who bought the spear that year. In the future, you must never under any circumstances utter the name Meng Hao in front of him. If you do, he’ll fly into a violent rage.” He continued on with some more earnest exhortation: “Furthermore, if you two ever leave the Sect to do training in the future, you must be extremely careful if you ever run into Meng Hao. His deviousness knows no bounds!”

The wide-eyed young woman’s face was covered with disbelief. However,

she quickly nodded, clearly placing the warning deep in her heart. Inside, Meng Hao laughed bitterly. Now he knew why they had looked so wary back in the Song Clan when they heard his name, and yet he didn't even recognize them.

"Remember," Bai Yunlai repeated, "the name Meng Hao is taboo in our Sect. Don't forget that! Okay, now we need to go get your identity medallions and handle your living arrangements." As of now, the girl clearly viewed Meng Hao as a fearsome tiger. Meng Hao could only laugh bitterly inside as Bai Yunlai led them away.

Soon they arrived at a valley which was relatively large and crowded.

"Since you've joined the Violet Fate Sect, you're obviously from local Cultivator Clans. As you know, we all have limits to our Cultivation bases. As apprentice alchemists, you must master the first technique of alchemy. Pay attention.

"This technique is called Violet Cloud Spirit. With this technique, you can feed a plant with your spiritual energy, and catalyze its effectiveness, which is based on its medicinal age. Depending on your skill and the nature of your Cultivation base, the catalyzation will produce different results."

There were several hundred people here. Most sat cross-legged, looking at the medicinal plants rocking back and forth in their hands. In the very front was a solemn, middle-aged man who was currently giving a lecture about some alchemic technique. He held up his hand, within which was a growing medicinal plant. In the blink of an eye, it grew up two inches.

Meng Hao looked around, focusing especially on the medicinal plant in the hand of the middle-aged man. His eyes gleamed with a strange light. Bai Yunlai led them to the center of the valley, where an unimposing man old man in a gray robe sat there with eyes closed. He looked like he was asleep. It was impossible to tell the level of his Cultivation base. Seemingly out of habit, Bai Yunlai walked over and retrieved two medallions and a bag of holding from the old man's side. He pulled out two violet-colored jade slips which he then handed to Meng Hao and the

young woman.

“Give it a try,” he said solemnly as the two looked at the jade slips. “The technique is very simple. You should be able to master it very quickly. Then, you’ll have a chance to try catalyzing for the first time. It’s very important, though. It will reveal your aptitude toward alchemy, and we have to record the results.”

*

1. Bai Yunlai’s name in Chinese is 白云来 bái yún lái – Bai is a common surname which means “white.” Yun means “cloud.” Lai means “come.”
2. Meng Hao sold the spear to Qian Shuihen and Lu Song in Chapter 56.

Chapter 212: Nature Talent Appears!

The young woman, whose name was Chen Ling, seemed nervous when she heard what Bai Yunlai said. With an anxious, earnest expression, she examined the jade slip. Perhaps her latent talent was average. After looking at it for the space of about ten breaths, she reached out her hand, which began to glow with a purple light...

Bai Yunlai's eyes began to glow.

"Not bad, Junior Sister Chen! Okay, take out a medicinal plant seed."

Chen Ling quickly opened her bag of holding and took out a seed. She placed it on her open palm, then, her face very serious, began to catalyze it. The purple Qi in her hand grew denser, until it seemed it couldn't grow any stronger. The seed began to wriggle, and then three leaves sprouted out of it.

Many of the surrounding onlookers noticed this, and then looked at Chen Ling. Her face grew red, and she was clearly excited. She looked at Bai Yunlai expectantly.

"To produce three leaves on your first try shows that you have pretty good latent talent. Junior Sister Chen Ling, according to my calculations, you have a ten percent chance of becoming a master alchemist in the future." He sighed emotionally, looking a bit jealous. It seemed that someone who could produce three leaves was uncommon among the hundred thousand apprentice alchemists. Bai Yunlai quickly recorded the results of her catalyzing.

After that...

The voice of the man lecturing about alchemy techniques drifted over. He sounded calm and solemn. "You will join District Two Valley Thirteen." His face was austere as he looked at her.

In a low voice, Bai Yunlai offered an explanation: "The hundred thousand apprentice alchemists of the Eastern Pill Division are separated into Districts One to Four. Generally speaking, only those with

outstanding latent talent can enter District Two. Junior Sister Chen, go on over there to Master Uncle Zhou. Luck is with you today!" Looking excited and nervous, Chen Ling immediately ran over.

"Junior Brother Fang, it's your turn now," said Bai Yunlai with a sigh. He looked at Meng Hao.

Meng Hao stood there thoughtfully for a moment. The technique described in the jade slip was simple, but obviously, the implementation of it was fantastic. Essentially, it could catalyze the medicinal age of medicinal plants, and as such, could be viewed as a force of nature.

"It seems only simple medicinal plants can be catalyzed using this technique," thought Meng Hao. "Basically, you use spiritual energy to nourish the medicinal plant. Even still, this technique is extraordinary. I wonder how the Violet Fate Sect prevents it from being stolen...." He silently retrieved a medicinal plant seed from his bag of holding and placed it on his palm. He looked at it for a moment, then used the technique described in the jade slip to begin catalyzing it.

He had two Core Seas, the first one of which contained five Perfect Dao Pillars. Before arriving at the Violet Fate Sect, he had used the Sublime Spirit Scripture to once again form the second one.

At the moment, the only Cultivation base visible to outsiders was the Qi of his second Core Sea. Its power caused the purple glow to appear on his hand. It was immediately apparent that the glow was thicker and brighter than that created by Chen Ling.

Immediately, the seed in Meng Hao's hand began to wriggle. Then it sprouted one leaf, two leaves, three leaves... in the blink of an eye it had already sprouted seven leaves!

The purple glow in Meng Hao's hand grew blinding, filling the air. Instantly, all the surrounding apprentice alchemists looked over, shocked. All eyes were on Meng Hao.

The blinding rays of light were unthinkable, unbelievable. The man lecturing about alchemy techniques looked over wide-eyed, staring openly at Meng Hao. Next to him, Chen Ling stared in shock.

As for Bai Yunlai, his jaw dropped, and he rubbed his eyes vigorously before staring in complete shock.

Everything was quiet as all onlookers stared at the violet glow and the medicinal seed plant in Meng Hao's hand. Then, Meng Hao continued to use the technique. He fell into a strange state, as if he himself had turned into nature, and this seed had become a part of him.

It was a marvelous feeling, and as Meng Hao immersed himself in it, the seed suddenly sprouted an eighth leaf, then a ninth.... A cracking sound pealed out as the seed continued to grow. The emerald green leaf sprouts grew larger, wrapping up and around Meng Hao's right arm.

The white-haired, wrinkled old man who had been dozing behind Bai Yunlai opened his eyes. They glowed with an ancient light as he looked at Meng Hao. At the same time, they filled with excitement.

Meng Hao hadn't just caused new leaves to sprout, he had grown an entire plant. Meng Hao's mind reeled as the cracking sounds from moments ago pulled him out of the bizarre state he had just been in. His eyes flickered, and he frowned. He hadn't intended to show off such talent, and actually, he had been completely immersed in the strange state just now, which had somehow led his actions.

He hesitated for a moment, his face pale. His Cultivation base was dried up, and following the reduction in his spiritual power, the medicinal plant also began to slowly wither up. Soon it died, and then fell off of Meng Hao's arm.

Panting, Meng Hao stepped back a few paces, eyes shining with confusion.

Everything was deathly silent. It seemed like Bai Yunlai couldn't understand what was going on. He had been in the Violet Fate Sect for years, and had never seen someone perform such an astonishing feat the first time they practiced catalyzing. He looked at Meng Hao as if he weren't even human.

All of the surrounding apprentice alchemists were completely shocked. What they had just witnessed exceeded their imaginations. The middle-

aged man panted as he looked at Meng Hao, his eyes shining with passion.

“Umm....” said Meng Hao, hesitating for a moment. He was a little bit scared, unsure of what he should say. At this moment, the old man behind Bai Yunlai stood up and walked forward to stand next to Meng Hao. He reached a hand out to grab Meng Hao’s wrist. His spiritual power burst out, flowing through Meng Hao’s body, examining him.

The power was incapable of completely examining Meng Hao. Despite having some suspicions, he could only see Meng Hao’s second Core Sea, which contained the power of the sixth level of Qi Condensation.

He wasn’t able to see the true color of the Core Sea either, as it had been completely transformed by the frightening power of the meat jelly. As far the man could see, everything was normal.

Eventually, he released his grip. He picked up the withered medicinal plant and looked at it carefully for a moment. Then he returned his gaze to Meng Hao. His eyes were now filled with the glow of praise.

“First rate latent talent! You will join District One Valley One!” A wide smile covered the old man’s face as he clasped Meng Hao’s shoulder. Then he flew up into the sky, taking the withered medicinal plant with him.

As he flew off, the entire valley broke out into a huge commotion.

“First rate latent talent!! No wonder his catalyzing is so astonishing!”

“With latent talent like that, he’s destined to become a master alchemist, which we haven’t seen for years....”

“Wow, I’ve heard of people having first rate latent talent, but I’ve never heard of someone as inhuman as this! He catalyzed full plant growth!”

As the air filled with conversations, Bai Yunlai approached Meng Hao, eye shining with excitement. “Junior Brother Fang,” he said, “make sure to watch out for yourself from now on. You have first rate latent talent!”

“Could there have been a mistake?” asked Meng Hao, still hesitating.

“There’s no way! Elder Wang tested you personally. How could he possibly make a mistake? It seems he took that medicinal plant to go

show other Elders. Haha! Junior Brother Fang, you're going to be famous! Come come, I'll take you to District One Valley One. It's like a celestial paradise. I look in every time I pass it, but I've never been able to go in." He pulled Meng Hao along with him, leaving behind the hubbub and shining eyes. Even after they were gone, the commotion continued to echo out.

Time passed. Soon half a month had gone by. Meng Hao was now much more familiar with the East Pill Division of the Violet Fate Sect. Division One Valley One wasn't very large, but was occupied by few people, clearly much less than other valleys.

The scenery was enchanting. The mountains were lush, and a small mountain stream flowed down from up above. Fish swam within its depths, which Meng Hao could see from his house, located just north of the stream. It was a small house with a courtyard outside.

Within the courtyard was a small garden where he could grow medicinal plants. Currently, Meng Hao sat cross-legged in the courtyard, holding a scroll of bamboo slips. The scroll was filled with handwriting and pictures, all describing various medicinal plants.

Meng Hao sat all morning and into noon reading the scroll. Finally, he looked up. He smelled the medicinal aroma that filled the air and listened to the gurgling of the stream. A light mist filled the area, causing the valley to truly seem celestial. Maybe that was somewhat of an exaggeration, but there was no denying that this was an ideal place for Cultivation.

This was basically the number one valley for apprentice alchemists in the entire Sect. Meng Hao had found out that including him, less than fifty people in the entire Sect had the requisite latent talent to live in here. Everyone had their own living quarters where they could study, grow plants and practice pill concocting.

It was a quiet location, and Meng Hao felt very at home. He was especially happy to read books that weren't jade slips but actual scrolls. It reminded him of his life as a scholar back in Yunjie County.

“One hundred thousand medicinal plants, all different and organized into different categories. Not only do I need to memorize them, I also need to remember their habits and characteristics, how to plant and harvest them, and how to store them. I need to remember which medicinal plants cannot be mixed together, where and how to grow them, and also the proper ratios when using them.

“Furthermore, it’s not just the whole plant itself. The leaves, stems and sap of various plants are all different. Splicing plants together can lead to countless variations. They talk about one hundred thousand medicinal plants, but actually, when you combine everything together, it’s more like a million.” Meng Hao rubbed the bridge of his nose. For the past half month, he had been studying information about medicinal plants every day.

As an apprentice alchemist of the Violet Fate Sect, he must remember all such information. Of course, there was simply so much information, it was essentially impossible to magically brand it all onto the mind. The only method was rote memorization.

The more he memorized, the more prepared he would be. Forewarned is forearmed, so to speak; there was no trickery about it. Besides, Meng Hao didn’t find it annoying. He was a born scholar, after all, and this type of environment suited him quite well.

There was no killing, no danger and treachery, no dealing with the wind and rain of the outside world. Meng Hao attempted not to think about the past, and instead fully immersed himself in the role of Fang Mu. He was in the Violet Fate Sect now, and he intended to take advantage of the peace and quiet. As he examined all the information available to apprentice alchemists, his mind began to swirl with many images. Now he knew that this sort of knowledge, was nature talent.

Chapter 213: Violet Fate Celestial Land

Time flashed by, and soon two months had gone by. Meng Hao was now completely accustomed to life in the Violet Fate Sect. Because of testing in with first rate latent talent, he had been able to enjoy some special perks, although it wasn't anything as amazing as others might have expected of some important person.

In fact, during the two months, he didn't see the white-haired old man at all. Bai Yunlai, on the other hand, frequently came to visit. It was with his help that Meng Hao came to understand the Violet Fate Sect so quickly.

There were lectures regarding alchemic techniques every day, which Meng Hao almost always attended. In the midst of the hundreds of others also in attendance, Meng Hao didn't stick out at all.

Different senior members of the Sect would give the lectures; they would rotate every few days. It seemed everyone's understanding of matters was slightly different. By listening to all of them, Meng Hao quickly began to have a much deeper understanding of the catalyzing techniques.

In addition, when it came to growing medicinal plants, the Sect had a special area to distribute medicinal plant seeds, much the same as the Reliance Sect had distributed Spirit Stones. The purpose, of course, was to allow the apprentice alchemists a chance to practice planting.

The various lectures by senior members of the Sect gave the whole place a very tranquil atmosphere. There was no fighting to the death. Meng Hao couldn't help but think that the Reliance Sect had been extremely different. To him, this place was in some ways more like an institute of higher learning than a Sect.

Every month, there would be a special sermon regarding medicinal scriptures. The officiators were always veteran master alchemists. Each and every one had risen up from the ranks of the apprentice alchemists. When it came to pill concocting, their skill was by no means shallow. Their alchemy lectures were not always limited to the topic of medicinal plants; they sometimes spoke of concoction techniques, too. Meng Hao

learned a lot after only listening to a few such sermons.

In addition to all of the studying and planting of medicinal plants, apprentice alchemists also had monthly catalyzing quotas to meet. Every month, a certain amount of catalyzed medicinal plants were required to be delivered up to the Sect.

This was the life of an apprentice alchemist in the East Pill Division. Life was a never-ending cycle.

Currently, Meng Hao sat amongst throngs of apprentice alchemists, listening to a middle-aged man supposedly discuss methods of distinguishing between several easily misidentified medicinal plants. “Apprentice alchemy involves the growing, catalyzing, and picking of various medicinal plants, as well as other related tasks. In essence, your purpose is to serve the great system of alchemy instituted by our Sect. In actuality, the most direct way to serve the Sect, is by means of assisting the nearly one thousand master alchemists.”

Meng Hao sighed. “I think joining the Violet Fate Sect was the right decision. In all the Southern Domain, this is the only place where I can study true alchemy. Also, only the Violet Fate Sect can produce true Grandmasters of the Dao of alchemy! The Violet Fate Sect’s Dao of alchemy is such that the fame of the alchemy division actually exceeds that of the other division. All Sects and Clans in the Southern Domain recognize this.” Meng Hao sat there thoughtfully, his eyes shining with anticipation.

“If I want to have any contact with Grandmaster Pill Demon, and get his help in dispelling my poison, then I have to be a disciple here!” Meng Hao’s eyes glittered with ambition.

His true goal in joining the Violet Fate Sect was to become a novitiate of Grandmaster Pill Demon and study the most powerful Dao of alchemy in the entire Southern Domain. Then he would create his own branch of alchemic arts. Afterward, any medicinal pills he needed, he could create himself, and not have to go through great pains to acquire by other means.

He was lost in thought when suddenly, the sound of bells filled the air.

The sound rang throughout all of the valleys of the East Pill Division, causing everyone to immediately lift their heads. Even the master alchemist giving the lecture immediately stopped and looked up.

Each and every apprentice alchemist in the Eastern Pill Division raised their heads. Their faces were filled with excitement.

“The furnace bells! Violet Fate Celestial Land day has arrived!”

“The last time was a year ago. I can’t believe a whole year has already passed. Finally, we can go back into the Celestial Land!”

As the excited voices echoed out, the peal of bells continued to ring out. Meng Hao’s eyes flashed as he looked up into the air, where suddenly appeared an illusory shape.

It was an enormous violet-colored pill furnace floating in mid-air, imposing to the extreme, tens of thousands of meters in diameter. Next to it, dozens of beams of prismatic light shot up from nearby valleys to sit cross-legged around it, as if to guard it.

At the same time, the glow of spells interlaced in the air, as if the entire area was being sealed. A radiant light filled the area, casting brilliant colors upon the massive pill furnace and the Cultivators who floated nearby it.

An archaic voice rumbled out, seemingly from nowhere. “Apprentice alchemists, enter the Celestial Land. Harvest nine mature leaves.” The enormous pill furnace began to glow, and suddenly, what appeared to be one hundred thousand strands of light snaked out and shot down. Meng Hao’s apprentice alchemist identification medallion began to glow, as did those of all the other apprentice alchemists.

The glowing strands and the medallions seemed to have some sort of connection. One of the glowing strands approached Meng Hao and fused into the medallion. A gentle power seemed to take hold of Meng Hao and pull him up into the air.

From the hundred surrounding valleys, one hundred thousand apprentice alchemists all lifted up into the air, carried by the glowing

strands. They transformed into beams of prismatic light that shot toward the gigantic pill furnace.

The massive pill furnace seemed to be like a bottomless pit which instantly swallowed them all up.

Meng Hao's vision grew blurry for a moment. When it cleared, and he saw what lay in front of him, he gasped. The scene was difficult to comprehend. The expression which appeared on Meng Hao's face was one of complete and utter shock.

In front of him stretched endless fields of medicinal plants. This place was a different world; there were no clouds in the sky. However, nine suns could be seen. Next to each sun, was a moon. This place had nine suns and nine moons.

This incredible sky was the perfect place beneath which to grow medicinal plants. The whole world seemed to be under some sort of sealing; as soon as Meng Hao appeared inside, an indescribable medicinal aroma washed over him. It was intoxicating.

Most of the hundred thousand apprentice alchemists had been here before. All of them were excited, but few were as shocked and moved as Meng Hao.

Even more shocking to Meng Hao was that within the endless fields of medicinal plants, were thousands of enormous, three hundred meter tall trees. And there were giants. These giants seemed to be remnants of an ancient past. They carefully strode through the fields, occasionally reaching down to plant seeds.

Up in the sky were several hundred war chariots, which emitted archaic Qi. The chariots were enormous, and overlapped with each other to form what almost looked like clouds that cast shadows down on certain areas within the world.

Further off in the distance, Meng Hao could see another type of tree that appeared to be three thousand meters tall. Its trunk was violet, and its top was not dense with foliage, but rather an enormous, solitary eye. The eye was dozens of meters wide, and it looked around the area attentively. As

Meng Hao looked around more carefully, he saw that there a few hundred other trees similar to this one amidst the fields of medicinal plants.

Meng Hao wasn't sure when, but Bai Yunlai had appeared at his side. With an emotional sigh, he said, "The Violet Fate Celestial Land is a Blessed Land of the Violet Fate Sect's East Pill Division! According to the legends, this place was once a Celestial Land of Immortals. However, Reverend Violet East moved it here to create this endless medicinal plant garden. There are some things growing here that are extinct in the outside world. Every once in a while, we apprentice alchemists are teleported here to harvest medicinal plants, which gives us a good chance to practice our skill in identifying them. This is the only place in the entire Southern Domain where you can see so many different types! They're virtually endless!"

Suddenly, a roaring sound filled the air, along with the archaic voice. The various conversations of the apprentice alchemists all ceased.

"You have one month to harvest at least nine mature medicinal plants. You may only harvest plants which you recognize, and you must also be thoroughly familiar with their habits and characteristics. In one month, you will hand over your harvest, as well as a jade slip describing your findings. This will be one of the evaluation criteria for promotion to master alchemist. Now, you may begin." As soon as the voice finished speaking, the hundred thousand apprentice alchemists took a collective breath, and then scattered.

Bai Yunlai didn't follow Meng Hao, but instead went along a meandering route of his own toward some other location. Meng Hao's eyes glittered, shining with excitement. His recent days had been spent devoted to reading medicinal plant scrolls. He had read several times about the hundred thousand varieties of medicinal plants, and although he hadn't memorized all of them yet, he knew quite a few. Now, he would be able to test his knowledge. His body flashed as he shot off into the distance.

As the hundred thousand apprentice alchemists scattered in all directions, above them in the sky, in one of the rotating moons, appeared eight figures.

“See that kid? That’s Fang Mu, the one who I tested two months ago and found to have first rate latent talent.”

“First rate latent talent is quite rare. We examined the withered plant you brought, and it’s definitely not fake. Because of his latent talent, his spiritual energy is extremely suited to growing medicinal plants.”

“He’s just a seedling now. Let’s see how many medicinal plants he manages to harvest. If he has a talent for identifying medicinal plants, then perhaps we should consider including him in the next promotion examination.”

As the figures within the moon engaged in their discussion, Meng Hao walked away from the groups of other apprentice alchemists, out into the fields of medicinal plants. He took each step prudently, being careful not to step on any seedlings. He kept his head lowered, looking around in all directions.

“That’s... Spirit Shattering grass. I remember its description from the scrolls. However, why does it have more foliage on the right side...? Oh, right, it’s a hybrid. The right side is actually a Residence sapling... This is Thunderbolt Elegance leaf, its shape is like that of a woman, and it sways back and forth entrancingly... When used medicinally, it can be concocted into pills suitable for the early Foundation Establishment stage.”

Meng Hao walked along, gradually identifying various medicinal plants and attempting to recall all the information he had read about them in the scrolls. The more he tried, the easier it became. A feeling of pleasure gradually filled his heart.

This feeling was different than that of making a breakthrough in Cultivation base. However, being able to master a branch of knowledge that had previously been elusive, filled him with a sense of profound confidence.

This was a Cultivation of the self!

From what Meng Hao could tell, his ability to identify all the different medicinal plants was a type of nature talent....

Meng Hao walked further and further away. Each time he saw a medicinal plant suitable for harvesting, he would immediately take it. At the same time, he would record a description and other information on the jade slip he had been given.

He continued to corroborate what he had studied recently; he was like a fish in water. He forgot about everything except the medicinal plants in front of him. His alchemy was advancing by leaps and bounds in this Celestial Land.

Meanwhile, outside in the Southern Domain, the name Meng Hao had caused an enormous search to begin among the great Sects and Clans. In recent days, everyone was looking for him. Soon, Meng Hao's name came to be known to more and more Cultivators.

Of course, the Violet Fate Sect was one of the Sects participating in the great search. However, no one had been able to find even the slightest trace of Meng Hao. It was as if he had completely vanished.

Chapter 214: We Finally Meet Again....

No one could possibly know that the same Meng Hao who had stirred up such waves in the outside world, was currently carefully looking over medicinal herbs in the Violet Fate Sect's Celestial Land, an innocent student confirming the validity of his studies.

Time passed by, and Meng Hao lost track of how many medicinal plants he had harvested. As long as he recognized a plant, it counted toward his quota, and he placed it in his bag of holding.

At one point, Meng Hao found himself about three hundred meters away from one of the giants. For quite some time, he observed how it planted the seeds, moved the seedlings around, and cared for the plants.

Later, he stood beneath one of the Cyclops trees, watching the enormous eye gazing about. He even climbed up one of them to harvest some of the red grass that grew on its trunk.

Eventually, he was far, far away from where he had started. The fields of medicinal plants seemed to have no end. In Meng Hao's estimation, these more remote areas would most certainly have even more amazing medicinal plants, perhaps even some of the legendary extinct variety.

However, everything was simply too big. Around him stretched never-ending fields of medicinal plants. As he proceeded, he started to realize that he actually only recognized about one medicinal plant out of one hundred.

"The Dao of alchemy is endless," he thought with a sigh. "It's just as difficult as Cultivation, a road without end, an almighty facet of Heaven and Earth. At first I thought that memorizing a bit more than half of the hundred thousand medicinal plants would be enough. But now I can see that those one hundred thousand plants are simply the threshold." However, stubbornness glinted in his eyes. This type of Cultivation had nothing to do with his Dao Pillars. His excitement actually became even stronger.

"I'm a scholar at heart," he said, reassuring himself. "Although my

aspirations were never realized, when it comes to studying, I definitely have an advantage over all the other apprentice alchemists.” He would focus, do his best to remember everything he saw, and then go back to do more research in the ancient records.

It was in this fashion that time slipped by. Soon, the sound of bells filled the Celestial Land; the one month time period had passed quickly. Time was up, and Meng Hao wasn't content. He felt as if he had just started. However, the strands of light appeared in the air, and he sighed. He gave one last look at the Celestial land before a strand of light whisked him away.

When they reappeared in the various valleys, there were a variety of expressions on the faces of the hundred thousand apprentice alchemists. Meng Hao wasn't the only one to have grown during the month inside the Celestial Land. All of the apprentice alchemists had.

Soon, people came to collect the medicinal plants they had harvested, along with their jade slips which contained information about the harvest. Meng Hao chose not to secretly duplicate any of his spoils. He was fully devoted to his Violet Fate Sect identity, and wouldn't do the slightest thing that might give himself away. He handed over all the medicinal plants, then slowly headed back to the valley that contained his house.

Once back in his courtyard, he immediately took out some scrolls and began to study. When he found areas that he had overlooked before, his face would flash with excitement, and he would commit the information to memory.

Two more months passed. He had already been in the Violet Fate Sect for half a year. Already, the search for Meng Hao in the outside world was slowing down. The various Sects and Clans had searched throughout the Southern Domain, and still hadn't been able to find a trace of Meng Hao. A variety of speculations began to circulate, but nothing conclusive could be determined.

Meng Hao heard all about the situation from Bai Yunlai, who well deserved his reputation for being well informed about everything. He

wasn't just familiar with the latest news about the Violet Fate Sect; he kept himself plugged into the events of the outside world as well.

One morning, Meng Hao walked out of his house to sit in the courtyard. He lifted up his right hand, within which was a small, growing plant. His medicinal plant garden was filled with quite a few plants, all in full bloom. A medicinal aroma filled the air. Suddenly, Meng Hao's expression flickered, and he looked up.

Bai Yunlai was racing along the side of the meandering stream. Before he even arrived, he called out, "Junior Brother Fang, there's an excellent opportunity! Your Elder Brother won a great opportunity for you!"

Meng Hao smiled. He waved his right hand, and the medicinal plant in his hand disappeared. At the same time, the courtyard door swung open, just in time for Bai Yunlai to rush in.

"What opportunity?" asked Meng Hao, smiling. Bai Yunlai's Cultivation base was ordinary, only at the seventh or eighth level of Qi Condensation. However, he was viewed as indispensable within the Sect. He often came to visit Meng Hao, and they spent quite a bit of time together.

"There's an Inner Sect disciple from the Violet Qi Division who requested Alchemist Li Tao¹ to concoct some pills for him," gushed Bai Yunlai. "Alchemist Li wanted me to arrange for two apprentice alchemists to assist. I will go, of course. As for the second spot, you were the first person I thought of."

"Quickly gather your things and come with me. This will be an excellent opportunity to expand your knowledge of alchemy. Lots of apprentice alchemists would like to go, but Alchemist Li's personality is a bit eccentric. Just don't say anything, and follow my lead."

Meng Hao's eyes glittered. He'd learned some time ago that Inner Sect disciples from the Violet Qi Division would often request master alchemists to concoct pills for them. Under most circumstances, the Violet Qi Division disciple would gather together the necessary medicinal plants, as well as some Spirit Stones. If this pleased the master alchemist, then work could begin.

As for Furnace Lords, who ranked above master alchemists, they were well versed in the Dao of alchemy, and had reached Foundation Establishment. There were only about one hundred of them in the entire Violet Fate Sect, and each one occupied a very prominent position. Generally speaking, Inner Sect disciples didn't qualify to request their services. Only Conclave disciples and Sect Elders could request pill concocting from Furnace Lords.

As for Violet Furnace Lords, they could be considered to be virtually at the Grandmaster level. Each and every one was a precious treasure of the Sect, and all were Pill Demon novitiates. Only those with extremely high influence within the Sect could request pills concocting services from them.

The Alchemist Li who Bai Yunlai referred to was naturally not a Furnace Lord, but one of the one thousand master alchemists. Considering how things were arranged, and considering how few master alchemists there were in the Sect, it was only natural that they would seek apprentice alchemists to act as assistants when concocting pills for Violet Qi Division disciples.

Meng Hao immediately rose to his feet. This really was a rare opportunity. He had joined the Sect more than half a year ago, and this was his first time to encounter such a chance. After clasping hands in thanks to Bai Yunlai, the two of them left. Soon, they arrived at the valley that connected the East Pill Division with the Violet Qi Division. Waiting there somewhat impatiently was a man in a blue robe who appeared to be about thirty years of age. It was none other than Alchemist Li.

Standing next to him was another Cultivator whose Cultivation base was at the early Foundation Establishment stage. He was smilingly engaged in conversation with Alchemist Li, his demeanor extremely courteous.

As Meng Hao and Bai Yunlai approached, Meng Hao's eyes glittered slightly. He recognized the Cultivator next to Alchemist Li. It was none other than Lu Song ².

Meng Hao's expression was calm as he and Bai Yunlai walked over. "So," he thought, "it turns out he's the one who wants the pills concocted."

Alchemist Li frowned as he looked at them. "Well, you're finally here."

Bai Yunlai hurriedly moved forward to say a few words of explanation, offering a few words of subtle flattery. Alchemist Li's expression softened a bit, and he flicked his sleeve. Together, they all followed a very courteous Lu Song out of the valley. As they passed through several valleys within the Violet Qi Division, Meng Hao examined the surroundings calmly. There were quite a few Violet Fate Sect disciples to be seen.

These were not disciples who cultivated the Dao of alchemy. When they saw Meng Hao and the others, respectful smiles filled their faces, and they clasped hands in greeting.

Soon, Lu Song led them to his Immortal's Cave, which was located halfway up one of the mountains. It had an excellent view, and was quite spacious inside, as well as excellently decorated. Once inside, Lu Song clasped hands and bowed to Alchemist Li.

"Brother Li, many thanks for your assistance," he said. "This batch of medicinal pills will be very useful." With that, he produced a bag of holding which he offered to Alchemist Li.

"You're too kind," said Alchemist Li, nodding. He smiled vaguely. "Unfortunately, this is my first time concocting pills for someone, and I'm worried I might not be the most suitable choice for you. However, considering you insisted, I really couldn't refuse." He scanned the bag of holding quickly with Spiritual Sense, and then tossed it to Bai Yunlai.

Lu Song looked a little embarrassed. Inwardly, he cursed the master alchemists for their tricky thievery. If they weren't invited out to concoct pills, where they could be observed, they would usually secretly pilfer some of the concocted pills. If they claimed success and returned some, then so be it, but if they claimed complete failure, there would be no way to confirm their story. This type of thing often occurred in the Sect.

"If it wasn't for the fact that I can't concoct my own pills," Lu Song said to himself, "and the Sect doesn't distribute them, then I wouldn't have any

dealings with these alchemists....” His face, however, was covered with a smile. He bowed again, and then glanced at Meng Hao and Bai Yunlai. They were not of the Foundation Establishment stage, however, he knew that among the apprentice alchemists were people who would one day be promoted to be master alchemists.

Meng Hao’s face was calm, but inside he was laughing. If he showed his real face, Lu Song would surely go crazy. Instead, Lu Song stood there smiling politely.

Alchemist Li laughed, knowing full well what Lu Song was thinking. He cleared his throat, and then produced a pill furnace. At the same time, several crimson-colored Spirit Stones flew out and embedded themselves into the ground. The pill furnace floated in the air above them. Alchemist Li’s face instantly became somber.

“I looked over the pill formula. With my mastery of the Dao of alchemy, there’s only a forty percent chance that I can successfully concoct the Six Harmonies Pill. Watch carefully during the process so that you don’t suspect me of hiding anything should I fail.” With that, his left hand pressed down onto the pill furnace. After a moment, it turned red and began to emit waves of heat.

“Take six blades of Seven Sieve grass and extract the veins. They must not be broken. Approaching Music flower petals, seven of them. I need them with stamen attached; catalyze if necessary. Red Apricot leaf, maturity level seven years, seven months, seven days. A deviation of more than ten days is unacceptable.” Alchemist Li’s words came faster and faster. In one breath he spoke out ten different medicinal plants.

Bai Yunlai immediately opened the bag of holding, which was full of a variety of medicinal plants, and began to produce the required plants. By the time he finished preparing the Approaching Music flower, Meng Hao had already catalyzed the Red Apricot Leaves with his left hand, and extracted the veins from the Seven Sieve grass with his right hand. He handed them over to Alchemist Li.

Alchemist Li looked up at Meng Hao for a moment, then nodded slightly

and began concocting. Occasionally he would say the name of a medicinal plant that he needed. Bai Yunlai sat there mutely for a moment. It was with a wry smile that he realized that Fang Mu was Alchemist Li's assistant, whereas he had become Fang Mu's assistant.

Whatever was required of him, Meng Hao would produce almost instantly. Not only was he fast, he didn't make any mistakes. Furthermore, when it came to catalyzing, he seemed to barely need to think before it was completed, and with utmost accuracy.

Alchemist Li continued to cast glances at Meng Hao, which eventually turned into looks of shock. Very quickly, it seemed as if he was no longer looking down on Meng Hao, but rather viewed him as an equal.

Even Lu Song noticed that when Alchemist Li spoke, Meng Hao would complete the task almost as soon as the words were out of his mouth. He took a deep breath. "This assistant alchemist isn't even human...."

It was at this exact moment that suddenly, a woman's voice echoed into the Immortal's cave from outside.

"Lu Song, do you have any news about that thing I asked you to look into?"

As soon as Meng Hao heard the voice, the plant he was currently catalyzing suddenly trembled.

*

1. Li Tao's name in Chinese is 历涛 Lì tāo – Li is a common surname, which also can mean "strict" or "severe." Tao means "great waves".
2. Lu Song is one of the two "iron spear victims" haha

Chapter 215: Lift Your Head

He only paused for a moment. It would be undetectable by anyone else. His expression didn't change in the slightest, and of course, he completed catalyzing the medicinal plant, which he then handed over to Alchemist Li.

He didn't look over as the woman entered the Immortal's cave.

She wore a white garment, and was pre-eminently beautiful. Upon looking at her, any man would stare and be instantly infatuated.

Her skin was so delicate it seemed a breath could damage it. She was tall and slender, with white, clear skin and luxurious hair that hung about her like a cloak. She gave off an otherworldly aura, and as she entered, a delicate fragrance filled the Immortal's Cave. Even Alchemist Li started to breath somewhat heavily, ignoring the pill furnace to watch her enter.

Chu Yuyan!

Her brow was slightly furrowed, and though her face was as beautiful as ever, it contained a hint of unpleasantness. No veil could conceal the bitterness which caused her to sigh lightly, and no wind could disperse it. Only she could understand the pressure, and the furtive glances, that she had endured recently.

After the events at the Song Clan half a year previous, Meng Hao's name instantly spread throughout the entire Southern Domain. That, of course, caused her name to be mentioned. Add in the fact that Wang Tengfei had participated in the Song Clan's search for a son-in-law, and the whole matter turned into a storm that had overwhelmed her. The engagement agreement between Chu Yuyan and Wang Tengfei instantly became a huge joke.

All of it was because of Meng Hao.

Chu Yuyan didn't hate Wang Tengfei. She could understand why Wang Tengfei didn't trust her, and had chosen to participate in the Song Clan's search for a son-in-law. She had picked the wrong person. Thankfully,

they were only engaged, and had not become official beloved. Nonetheless, Chu Yuyan couldn't help but sigh emotionally. Regardless of the circumstances, in the end, it had helped her to see what kind of person Wang Tengfei truly was.

She could accept the end result. She didn't need Wang Tengfei to explain anything. After the events at the Song Clan, she immediately sent the engagement agreement back to the Wang Clan, putting an end to the childish arrangement.

The person she truly hated was Meng Hao. It was a hatred that had seeped into her bones. However, at the same time, she continued to dream about the events within the volcano. It had turned into a pestering torment to her.

"Greetings, Elder Sister Chu," said Lu Song hastily. Alchemist Li also greeted her with clasped hands. Bai Yunlai sucked in a breath and lowered his head in greeting. Meng Hao also offered her greetings, although inside, he felt a bit remorseful.

How could he not have a bit of a guilty conscience? In all truth, it was the same in regard to the matter with Lu Song and Qian Shuihen. However, of all the people in the Violet Fate Sect, the person he least wanted to run into had been Chu Yuyan.

In his heart, Meng Hao felt that he had been a bit excessive in the way he dealt with her. However, given the circumstances at that time, he hadn't had much of a choice. Furthermore, if Chu Yuyan hadn't chased him down and tried to kill him to begin with, then none of it would have happened.

In any case, Meng Hao still felt bad.

"I was planning to go look for you just after this," said Lu Song. "I made a lot of inquiries about that damned Meng Hao, but he seems to have disappeared into thin air." He couldn't help but grind his teeth when he said Meng Hao's name. "There's not a single clue to be found about him. In fact, some of the Sects have been watching the people he's made friends with, but in this entire half-year, he hasn't appeared. A lot of

people think that that damned, despicable, wretched animal must have left the Southern Domain. He deserves to die by a thousand knife cuts!"

Chu Yuyan frowned. During the past half year, she had constantly sent people out to look for Meng Hao. Despite her insistence on tracking him down, he seemed to have thoroughly vanished.

"How could he have left the Southern Domain?" thought Chu Yuyan. "All his old Sect members are here. Unless he provoked some calamitous, irreparable disaster, why would he leave? Actually, what happened in the Song Clan was really a stroke of luck on his part. He could join any Sect, hand over the Sublime Spirit Scripture, and turn a dangerous situation into a position of safety. Meng Hao is bizarrely crafty, there's no way he would fail to realize that, is there?"

"In my estimation, he is most certainly still in the Southern Domain. We just don't know where he's hiding. If I ever find him...." She gnashed her teeth. She was just about to turn and leave, when her gaze fell upon Meng Hao. She stared at him, and then suddenly spoke. Her voice was no longer warm, but filled with coldness. "Lift your head."

Meng Hao was astonished. "I've changed my appearance," he thought, "and yet she still focuses on me." Despite his astonishment, his face was blank and confused as he looked up at her.

Chu Yuyan's brow furrowed. She wasn't sure why, but when she looked over this young man, her heart filled with an unexplainable irritation. Looking at him, though, she was sure she had never seen him before.

Her eyes flickered as she thought, "Something's wrong. Why would I instantly be annoyed with someone for no apparent reason?" She studied Meng Hao for a moment longer to no avail.

Meng Hao groaned inwardly. "How can this girl be so astute?" he thought. Despite his change in appearance, and the other people present, she had somehow sensed something and come to focus on him. His heart suddenly began to race. Suddenly, he shifted his gaze to look at her chest, and then deliberately gulped.

A somewhat dirty expression flitted over his face, and he intentionally

blushed. Now, he didn't look lecherous, but rather like a teenager seeing a beautiful woman for the first time. In such a situation, it would be a natural reaction to look so ill at ease.

His expression caused Chu Yuyan's frown to deepen. A look of disgust appeared on her face, and she turned wordlessly to leave the Immortal's Cave, ignoring the feeling of irritation which had welled up within her.

After Chu Yuyan left, everyone in the Immortal's Cave breathed a sigh of relief. Lu Song quickly sealed the main door, and Alchemist Li shook his head. It was hard to tell what he was thinking, but after another sigh, he continued with the pill concoction.

"Elder Sister Chu has sure changed a lot recently," murmured Bai Yunlai. "She never used to be like this. Now she's completely cold and gloomy. I was shivering just now."

"It's all the fault of that Meng Hao," said Lu Song, grinding his teeth. "That damned, despicable wretch deserves to die by a thousand knife cuts, ten thousand times! If I ever run into him, I'll tear him to pieces! I'll rip his flesh off the bone with my own teeth and grind his bones to pieces!" The depth of his hatred was visibly apparent. After he finished speaking, he looked at Meng Hao with a strange expression in his eyes, then suddenly smiled good-naturedly and nodded.

He had obviously noticed that Meng Hao was no ordinary apprentice alchemist, and there was no small chance that he would become a master alchemist in the future. Obviously, the sooner he made friends with him the better.

Meng Hao coughed dryly. He wasn't exactly thin-skinned. However, moments ago Lu Song had been hatefully grinding his teeth and cursing, and with the next breath, was beaming with goodwill. Meng Hao had the feeling that he would have to get used to such things.

It took the entire day to finish concocting the pills. The moon was rising by the time the fragrant aroma wafted up from the pill furnace, and the medicinal pills that Lu Song needed emerged.

Because it had been a relatively hasty concoction, the medicinal plants

which should have produced seven or eight pills ended up only producing two. Meng Hao could easily tell that it had something to do with Alchemist Li's technique.

This was the first time he had participated in pill concoction. The entire time, he had been observing Alchemist Li's concocting techniques, and had learned quite a bit. It seemed it would soon grow dark outside. Lu Song happily escorted them out of the Immortal's Cave and all the way back to the East Pill Division, before clasping hands and leaving.

In the following days, Meng Hao continued his studies regarding medicinal plants. However, because of the deep impression he'd left on Alchemist Li, he had a new daily task. Whenever Alchemist Li concocted pills, be it in his own Immortal's Cave or someone else's, he would always send for Meng Hao to be his assistant. Li Tao found that with Meng Hao at his side, pill concocting went much smoother.

In addition, Li Tao would often give Meng Hao pointers regarding alchemy. Soon, Meng Hao no longer considered himself unfamiliar with alchemy. He was becoming more and more comfortable with it. The more he saw, the more he learned; he was steadily improving, bit by bit.

Dealing with others was not a complicated matter. For example, Meng Hao's relationship with both Bai Yunlai and Alchemist Li was very simple. It was all based on how they could help each other.

If it weren't for Meng Hao's skill as an apprentice alchemist, Li Tao wouldn't have been so impressed with him, nor would he constantly seek him out as an assistant.

The days passed like this for three months. Meng Hao was completely assimilated into life in the Violet Fate Sect. In the time he had been there, he had met a lot of people, and many people had come to know his name.

Whenever he went out, he would run into familiar faces with whom he could chat and joke. Everything was very harmonious and peaceful. Everyone greeting him with clasped hands. Not a soul knew that this up and coming apprentice alchemist named Fang Mu, was the person who so many months ago had caused a storm in the Southern Domain, Meng

Hao.

One day, Meng Hao found himself in Li Tao's Immortal's cave, assisting in pill concocting. After the pill concocting was finished, Li Tao escorted Meng Hao to the mouth of his Immortal's Cave. Suddenly, he spoke.

"Fang Mu, I want you to know that to me, you are no apprentice alchemist. Your skill with medicinal plants places you in the rank of master alchemist as far as I'm concerned."

Meng Hao stopped walking and looked at Li Tao. He clasped his hands and bowed. It was a completely sincere bow. Li Tao was at the early Foundation Establishment stage, but in the time they had spent together, Meng Hao had found him to be, not cold and haughty, but actually very approachable, even kind.

Meng Hao's understanding of alchemy had significantly improved as a result of their relationship.

"In one month," continued Li Tao enthusiastically, "there will be a promotion examination. I've made some inquiries, and found that only one apprentice alchemist will be selected for promotion. If that happens, and you are raised to master alchemist, then you will finally be able to learn the true Dao of alchemy of the Violet Fate Sect. If you become a master alchemist, you will be assigned your own Immortal's Cave, and your own furnace fire. You will no longer study medicinal plants, but pill concoction!

"The only frustrating thing," he continued sincerely, "is that only people who have served as apprentice alchemists for ten years can participate in the exam this time. If you're interested in participating, though, I'll see if I can apply to get you a spot. You think about it. Perhaps you can come up with your own a method to join. If you manage to seize an opportunity like this, you might be able to save yourself ten years of time."

Meng Hao's heart began to thump, and he once again bowed to Li Tao. "Many thanks, Elder Brother Li."

They exchanged a few more words, whereupon Meng Hao bowed and took his leave. As he walked along the mountain paths, he looked up at

the moon, and his eyes began to shine brightly.

“I can’t spend ten years as an apprentice alchemist,” he thought. “I must think of a way to seize this chance. My previous activities in the Sect must have drawn a bit of attention....” Continuing to ponder these matters, Meng Hao entered Division One Valley One. As he walked into his courtyard, his heart trembled, although his expression stayed the same. After pushing open the gate, he found that standing there in the courtyard was a white-haired old man. He immediately caused a look of surprise to appear on his face.

This was the same old man who had tested his latent talent the year he joined the East Pill Division. He was a Furnace Lord named Wang Fanming¹. He stood there looking at Meng Hao’s medicinal plant garden. As soon as Meng Hao entered the courtyard, he turned and gazed into Meng Hao’s eyes.

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1. Wang Fanming’s name in Chinese is 王凡明 wáng fán míng – Wang is a common surname. Fan means “ordinary.” Ming means “clear” or “bright”.

Chapter 216: The Meaning of Grandmaster

The instant the old man turned and looked at Meng Hao, his eyes filled with a bright light and he said, "You joined the East Pill Division with a recommendation medallion from a Furnace Lord. What is your purpose here?!" A mysterious pressure locked onto Meng Hao's body.

As the man spoke the words, he took a step forward.

When the step fell, ghost images vibrated up everywhere, as if the area had been cut off from the rest of the world. Such a scene gave the feeling that any escape was impossible.

Even while his first words were still echoing out, he spoke again, "I've thoroughly investigated all of the Cultivators with the surname Fang in the entire State of Eastern Emergence. I couldn't find any record of you anywhere. As an alien in the State of Eastern Emergence, tell me... why are you here?" It was obviously supposed to feel like an interrogation. Add in the display of power, and it seemed as if dark storm clouds were rolling Meng Hao's way.

Inside, Meng Hao was calm. However, his face visibly paled, and he stood in place, body trembling slightly. His chin, though, was set stubbornly.

"State your real name, and reveal your purpose here! This is your last chance. If you refuse to come to your senses, then don't blame me for being ruthless!" The old man took another step forward. When the step fell, the sound of rumbling thunder filled the courtyard. A fierce wind sprang up, and waves of pressure roiled out. The medicinal plants in the garden seemed as if they were being harmfully catalyzed; they were growing dark and ugly.

Meng Hao's face grew paler. However, inwardly, he was as calm as ever. This old man's Cultivation base was at the Core Formation stage, and his words seemed cold and merciless. In reality, though, he was obviously

bluffing. Considering Meng Hao's path of Cultivation, and the level of his experience and training, how could he not tell?

He had already been in the Violet Fate Sect for the better part of a year. After all this time, the fact the old man chose today to come visit was telling. Meng Hao only had to think a moment to come to a fairly certain conclusion.

Obviously, the promotion day was approaching, and although Meng Hao didn't qualify to participate, his first rate latent talent had attracted quite a bit of attention in the East Pill Division. That was the whole purpose of this whole scene; the display of power was basically a warning of sorts.

All of these thoughts flitted through Meng Hao's mind in an instant. He also thought about how he had crossed the chain bridge to enter the Sect, and his heart grew even calmer. He took a deep breath and, continuing to keep his face pale, clasped his hands and bowed deeply to the old man.

His expression bitter, his voice light, he said, "Sir, my name really is Fang Mu, and I am not from the State of Eastern Emergence. I have long yearned for the Dao of alchemy, and that is why I thirsted to join the Violet Fate Sect. I have no other purpose. I wholeheartedly wish to study alchemy.

"Unfortunately, the Violet Fate Sect does not accept outsiders, so I had to figure out another way to get the recommendation medallion from a Furnace Lord. In order to enter the Sect, I had no choice other than to use subterfuge. I had no option. Sir, if you believe junior is in error, then I will accept any punishment the Sect deems fit." Meng Hao bowed down and held the bow, not lifting himself up straight.

Everything was quiet. The old man looked at Meng Hao. He had long since investigated Meng Hao, and knew there were some things about him that weren't quite right. However, there were one hundred thousand apprentice alchemists in the Sect. More than a few of them had things about them that weren't quite right. The fact that they had passed the Bridge of Truth, however, was evidence that they harbored no ill intent toward the East Pill Division. If they did have any such secrets, they would

not be able to pass the bridge.

If Meng Hao was an ordinary apprentice alchemist without first rate latent talent, then the old man wouldn't have paid him the least bit of attention, and things would have run their course naturally. However, Meng Hao's latent talent had attracted not just the attention of this old man, but other Furnace Lords in the East Pill Division. When the question came up regarding his qualifications to participate in the promotion examination, he went against convention to acquire a spot for Meng Hao... which therefore led to the current scene.

Wang Fanming was quiet for a moment. Then, he looked at Meng Hao and coolly said, "Once you join the Eastern Pill Division, you may never forsake it, not for the rest of your life. Can you do so?"

Meng Hao finally stood up straight. Looking at the old man with determination in his face, he spoke in a voice that could chop nails and sever iron: "It is a great kindness on the part of the Sect to teach me about the Dao of Alchemy. As long as the Sect doesn't kick me away, I will never forsake it!"

Actually, after living in the Violet Fate Sect for the better part of a year, being part of the East Pill Division, and studying alchemy, Meng Hao really had developed this view. As long as he could stay here and study alchemy, he would not leave the Sect.

The old man gave Meng Hao a deep look. "I don't care about your background. If you say you're Fang Mu, then you are Fang Mu. However, if you ever betray the Sect, I will take away your Dao of alchemy. If I am unable to, there will be another alchemist in the East Pill Division who can." He flicked his sleeve, and a medallion shot toward Meng Hao.

It landed in Meng Hao's hand, glowing mysteriously, radiating coldness.

"In one month, you may attend the examination for promotion to master alchemist. Only one candidate will be selected. Whether or not you are selected will depend on your luck." With that, Wang Fanming turned and flew away, disappearing in the blink of an eye.

As he said, he didn't care about Meng Hao's background. There were

many people in the Violet Fate Sect who had mysterious backgrounds. Even among the Furnace Lords were people who had previously been members of other Sects, or who had enemies in the outside world and joined the East Pill Division to hide.

Actually, Wang Fanming himself was not from the State of Eastern Emergence. It was only because of various circumstances that he ended up becoming a Cultivator of the East Pill Division.

This was the tradition within the East Pill Division, a tradition created by someone who commanded high prestige and universal respect in the Violet Fate Sect: Grandmaster Pill Demon.

Grandmaster Pill Demon had uttered the following words regarding the East Pill Division: "One must take the long view when traversing the great path of the Dao of alchemy. Any qualified alchemist may become a Cultivator of the East Pill Division. The only requirement is that he harbor no ill intentions, nor have the reckless ambition of wild wolves."

Because of this, the traditions of the East Pill Division of the Violet Fate Sect had existed for a very long time. Unfortunately, it had also led to circumstances in which disciples forsook the Sect. Despite that, the techniques of the East Pill Division had never been revealed. Many outsiders wondered about this mystery, and also why those who forsook the Sect were so sentimental about it afterward.

In actuality, from time immemorial, all disciples who forsook the Sect were eventually brought back. Except for two. Those two had rocked the Southern Domain, and were the only two people other than Pill Demon to become Grandmasters of the Dao of alchemy!

Both of them had once been novitiates of Grandmaster Pill Demon. Eventually, they brought forth new ideas and innovations. Regardless of what outsiders thought, these two never believed their skill could outmatch that of their Master.

The reason they had become famous, and the reason they never returned to the Sect, was also because of the words of Grandmaster Pill Demon, words that continued to be passed down to this very day.

“Along the path of the Dao of alchemy, if a hundred flowers bloom, who has the right to permit only the Mudan peony to exist? Cannot the lesser peony and the orchid also coexist? Thus is birthed the flower garden. If the medicinal plant garden only contained one medicinal plant, how could the Dao of alchemy come into being? ¹

“If those who inherit my Dao of alchemy are full of the ambitions of wild wolves, I will take back the Dao of alchemy. However, he who can weed through the old to bring forth the new, he who can tread the untrodden path, that person may establish his own school of thought. If he is able to bear the weight of the title Grandmaster, then it has nothing to do with me. In that case, there is no need to discuss returning to me.”

Because of this, there are three alchemists called Grandmaster. In reality, though, the Dao of alchemy in the Southern Domain has only one true Grandmaster!

Pill Demon!

Meng Hao watched Wang Fanming leave, and his eyes shone with a mysterious light. He never thought he would be able to secure a spot in the promotion examination so quickly. He looked down thoughtfully at the jade slip he held in his hand. His eyes glinted, and he cast Spiritual Sense into it. His mind suddenly shook.

In his head suddenly appeared the words:

Alchemy Scripture!

He sat down cross-legged in the courtyard, holding the jade slip in hand. He closed his eyes and immersed himself in the Alchemy Scripture which had appeared in his head. It wasn't until the sun began to rise the following morning that he slowly opened his eyes. He took a deep breath, and looked off at the distant mountain peaks. His eyes were filled with reverence. He sat there quietly for a long time.

This so-called Alchemy Scripture was in fact not really a scripture. Actually, it was a record of events which had occurred in the East Pill Division in the thousand years since Grandmaster Pill Demon rose to

fame.

There were many stories recorded, for example the origins of the two other Grandmaster alchemists of the Southern Domain, as well as various quotations from Grandmaster Pill Demon. After examining the entire Alchemy Scripture, an image appeared in his mind of a figure standing at the peak of the Dao of alchemy.

Now he understood why Wang Fanming was so quick to discard the issue of his hidden past.

Meng Hao slowly put away the jade slip. He took a few deep breaths, and then began his daily apprentice alchemist cultivation.

Time went by slowly. Soon, a month had passed. The news about the examination for apprentice alchemists with ten years of experience, spread like wildfire throughout the East Pill Division. It quickly became the only conversation topic among the apprentice alchemists.

Roughly eighty percent of the apprentice alchemists had ten or more years of experience. However, not all would participate in the promotion examination. Only thirty thousand slots were available for registration.

When the day of the test came, the entire East Pill Division bustled with noise and excitement. The furnace bells rang out, and an enormous pill furnace once again appeared up in the air. Tens of thousands of strands of light reached out toward the qualified apprentice alchemists, who were all bursting with excitement. Meng Hao was among them as they shot toward the pill furnace.

In the blink of an eye, thirty thousand people vanished. When they reappeared, it was not in the Celestial Land of medicinal plant fields. Instead, they were in an enormous public square paved with limestone. In the middle of the square was a gigantic blue-green pill furnace. Medicinal aroma wafted out from it, filling the square with medicinal mists and clouds.

Arranged in the enormous square were thirty thousand worktables. On the surface of each worktable was a black jade slip. As the thirty thousand participants arrived, there was no hubbub or racket. They all looked

nervously toward the pill furnace, which was surrounded by eight old men, sitting cross-legged.

One of them was Wang Fanming.

The crowd of people looked down at the eight men, who slowly opened their eyes. They looked over everyone with kind, gentle expressions.

“In the promotion exam of the East Pill Division, one person shall be selected from your midst to practice the Cultivation of the Dao of alchemy! The examination consists of two rounds. The first round is an elimination round which only ten participants will pass. The second round is the final round, from which one master alchemist will emerge!

“One hundred thousand medicinal plants. One million variations. Your task is to silently list them out. Write down as many as you can think of! In front of you are thirty thousand work stations. Please organize yourselves among them and prepare to begin!”

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1. The “ Mudan peony ” referred to here is the peony which once was the national flower of China. It is also called the “king of flowers.” What I’m translating as the “ lesser peony ” is another type of peony flower that resembles the Mudan peon. These two are sometimes contrasted. For example, in the ancient court, the Empress would be the Mudan peony and the concubines would be the lesser peonies.

Chapter 217: Struggling for Plant Mastery

All thirty thousand apprentice alchemists were respectful and solemn. Quite a few had full heads of white hair. Other than Meng Hao, not a one appeared to be under thirty years of age.

They had all been apprentices for at least 10 years and had deep, profound understanding of medicinal plants. Practice had ingrained the knowledge so deeply that if they left the Sect for another on the outside, they would be rated as a medicinal plant Grandmaster.

Right now, they solemnly filed forward toward the workstations. Meng Hao took a deep breath as he looked around at the workstations, selected one, and sat down.

This was his first time participating in an examination for promotion from apprentice alchemist. However, the feeling was not strange to him. Actually... everything felt quite familiar.

The scene around him was very much like the examinations he had taken part in back when he was a scholar in the State of Zhao. He had participated in the preliminary rounds of the Imperial examinations on multiple occasions, and although he had never scored top marks, he was still very familiar with the process.

Meng Hao chuckled to himself. "There really are a lot of similarities between the two. This master alchemist promotion examination tests your knowledge of medicinal plants. The more plants you remember, the more details you recall, and the more accurately you do so, will determine how close to perfection your final score is. It's not very different at all from the imperial examinations." He felt like he was back in the imperial examination hall. Except this time, he was not aiming for a scholarly rank, but promotion in the Dao of alchemy.

He took another deep breath and looked around at all the apprentice alchemists as they peered down at the jade slip in front of them. Suddenly, magical glowing screens appeared in front of them, upon which could be seen various medicinal plants.

The task of all the apprentice alchemists was to identify the plants they recognized and then record their habits and characteristics, planting requirements, harvesting methods and any other details.

Seeing that many of the participants had already started, Meng Hao tapped his jade slip, and immediately, a magical screen appeared. He stared thoughtfully at the medicinal plant which appeared, and then began to record the name of the plant, its characteristics, and some other details.

Time passed. The square was quiet and peaceful. The eight old men who sat cross-legged by the pill furnace appeared to Meng Hao to be the test administrators. They looked around the examination square. Clearly, if anyone caused a disturbance, severe punishment would follow.

Meng Hao soon fell into a rhythm of answering the questions. He quickly recorded the information about the plants that appeared in front of him. Many of them he had seen with his own eyes in the Celestial Land. Others, he had even held in his own hands when assisting Li Tao in pill concoction.

Six hours quickly passed. Meng Hao was immersed in filling out his answers. His eyes shone with determination. He had discovered that this was an excellent method to verify how much he had learned. All of the information he had studied about medicinal plants during the better part of the year once again floated up in his mind.

As he reached down into the depths of his memory, he began to experience the same feeling he had as a scholar all those years ago, the joy that can be found in the midst of hardship.

Soon, it became apparent that some of the surrounding apprentice alchemists were wearing out. Some frowned, obviously wracking their brains for answers. More time went by, another four hours. Some of the apprentice alchemists were pale-faced. Many were clearly encountering unfamiliar medicinal plants, which they would skip past quickly. However, soon, they discovered that the unfamiliar plants became more and more frequent. Eventually, people began to abandon their struggles and bitterly

leave the examination field. They moved off to the side to observe.

Within a short time, more and more apprentice alchemists began to stare bitterly at the screens in front of them. They would stare blankly for a while, then stand and walk off to the side, heaving bitter sighs. Despite ten or more years of experience, many of these people had difficulty remembering so many medicinal plants. After all, there were one hundred thousand of them, with a million variations. If one's Cultivation base was high enough, Divine Sense could be used to brand the information in one's mind; without that ability, though, the only other method was rote memorization, which was incredibly difficult.

Meng Hao, of course, was by nature a scholar and an intellectual. From the moment he had begun to tread the path of a scholar, each and every day had been devoted to memorizing things.

His expression was calm, and his gaze was locked onto the screen in front of him. He zoned out everything else, focusing completely on the ever-changing medicinal plants. The more questions he answered, the happier he grew. His movements were like floating clouds and flowing water, natural and spontaneous. Soon, he began to attract the attention of some of the people who had given up, and were now observing the proceedings.

More time passed. The examination had now been underway for twenty hours. Of the original thirty thousand participants, only twenty thousand continued to fill in answers. The surroundings were as quiet as ever. Those who had abandoned their efforts did not leave, they stood by quietly, watching on.

By the time the thirtieth hour arrived, only seventy percent of the twenty thousand participants remained. The eyes of these more than ten thousand apprentice alchemists were bloodshot. Each and every one doggedly stared at their respective glowing screens, continuing to fill in information from their studies.

Meng Hao was as calm as ever. The speed with which he answered the questions caused Wang Fanming and the other old men to cast sidelong

glances at each other.

By the fortieth hour, only thirty percent or so of the participants had not given up.

By the sixtieth hour, only six thousand remained in the square, continuing on madly with the examination. Already, quite a few were obviously about to give up. If they looked around, they would see that their compatriots were madly going all out, jaws clenched as they pondered the images of the medicinal plants in front of them, attempting to recall their habits and characteristics.

By the time eighty continuous hour of testing had passed, only three thousand participants remained. They had been answering questions for four days and four nights with no rest whatsoever. They were like mad devils who could remember everything.

When the one hundredth hour arrived, an older man who appeared to be about fifty years old coughed up a mouthful of blood and then collapsed to the ground. His previously gray hair was now completely white. The scene caused quite a commotion, and quite a few of the surrounding apprentice alchemists immediately stood pale-faced and gave up.

They knew that if they continued, they may very well die here this day. They walked off to the side, supported by fellow apprentice alchemists. Everyone was now watching the remaining thousand test takers, their eyes filled with fear and dread. They knew full well how fearsome these people were.

Only incredibly extraordinary individuals could remember so many of the hundred thousand plants and one million variations.

Meng Hao took a deep breath. His eyes felt gritty, so he closed them for a moment to rest. Then he opened them, focusing on the medicinal plants and continuing to fill out answers.

Time passed by in a blur. The number of people who remained answering questions grew smaller and smaller. One thousand, eight hundred, five hundred, three hundred... By the time one hundred and eighty hours had passed, only eleven people remained!

The eleven people all sat in different locations within the enormous square, competing with unbridled frenzy. Meng Hao was frowning. Some of the plants in front of him required a careful search of his memory to recall.

This was especially true of the medicinal plants that were easily misidentified. These could only be correctly identified by carefully examining various tiny details. In fact, in some cases, they could only be distinguished by taste; unfortunately only images were available, which meant that even further examination was required before any information could be recorded.

The other ten people all were pale-faced, and their eyes radiated with ferocity. Having endured all the way down to this point, they obviously were not willing to give up. This test was a trial by fire, and an unforgiving one at that. Only ten mistakes or oversights were allowed, and then, instant disqualification.

In this test, no one could masquerade as having ability. The best among the apprentice alchemists would be visible in a single glance.

Suddenly, one of the final eleven suddenly grew white as death. His expression changed as the screen in front of him suddenly disappeared. He stared mutely for a long moment, then staggered to his feet and laughed bitterly. A fellow apprentice alchemist held him by the arm as he left his workstation.

The observing apprentice alchemists began to breathe heavily. There were now only ten participants left; these ten had already passed into the second round of the examination.

However, not a single one stood up!

Despite being assured a pass to the next round, all of these apprentice alchemists aspired to be master alchemists. Being so ambitious and proud, they possessed the spirit of competition; they naturally wanted to see who would be the first among them all!

Each and every one of them possessed the same mentality. All of the surrounding thirty thousand apprentice alchemists were watching on with

rapt attention. They were all wondering, in the end... who would place first?

Wang Fanming and the seven other old men watched on wordlessly. They said nothing to end the examination, and instead watched on quietly.

Time passed by. These ten people, including Meng Hao, were all well-known figures amongst the apprentice alchemists. All of them were clearly qualified to become master alchemists. Their eyes were completely bloodshot as they stared at the screens in front of them. None gave up.

Meng Hao closed his eyes for a moment and took a deep breath. When he opened them, he found himself looking at a very rare medicinal plant. In fact, this was a plant that was not among the one hundred thousand medicinal plants, but rather, a hybrid grass that was one of the one million variations.

Even those Cultivators in the Southern Domain who considered themselves experienced and knowledgeable, would only be able to stare in frustration at such a plant.

“It’s getting harder and harder,” thought Meng Hao, sighing deeply. “But that only makes things more interesting.” His face radiated stubbornness. As of now, the aura of a Cultivator had grown faint around him, to be replaced by the implacability of a scholar. This was the stubbornness of someone who had repeatedly failed in the imperial examinations, and yet continued to participate.

After joining the East Pill Division, Meng Hao realized that he really was innately inclined to practice alchemy!

Perhaps in terms of Cultivation, his latent talent was not extraordinary. But when it came to alchemy, however, he possessed true genius! Whether it was memorizing medicinal plants, or catalyzing them, he stood head and shoulders above all others.

In fact, you could say that this was not innate talent, this was nature talent! Nature talent regarding all plants and vegetation!

Meng Hao suddenly recalled the words of Shui Dongliu ¹. Gradually he

came to realize that he didn't always have nature talent. This nature talent came from the Resurrection Lily!

Meng Hao wasn't sure how much time had passed. Soon, one screen after another went dark among the final ten. They had clearly made more than ten mistakes, and were out.

Soon the hour arrived in which only two people remained!

One was Meng Hao, the other was a grim-faced, middle-aged man. As they continued with the examination, the middle aged man would look up from time to time at Meng Hao. His eyes slowly filled with crazed determination.

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1. Shui Dongliu's words as referenced here are from only a few chapters ago, chapter 208 to be specific.

Chapter 218: First Round First Place!

The middle-aged man's eyes were blood red as he stared at the medicinal plant in front of him. "I joined the Sect twenty years ago," he said "I've been an apprentice alchemist for half my life. Do you really think you can compare to me?" However, his face was gradually growing white. He had already made nine mistakes, so he now had only one chance left. Unfortunately, as for the plant in front of him... he didn't recognize it.

After a long time passed, the middle-aged man laughed sadly, then slowly stood up. He didn't record an answer. He took a long look at the medicinal plant, committing it to memory, then walked away.

As of now, Meng Hao was the only person left in the square!

The gaze of every single person, including Wang Fanming and the seven other old-timers, was focused solely on Meng Hao!

This was because... he was still filling out answers!

Meng Hao had no idea many how many answers he had provided. One hundred thousand medicinal plants, one million variations. Perhaps he had recorded half, perhaps more. He took a deep breath and focused on the medicinal plants on the screen in front of him. He gradually became aware that some of the medicinal plants were ones he had never seen before. However, after looking at them and thinking for a moment, the information regarding them would appear in his head.

The hundred thousand plants and one million variations that he had studied were simply a foundation. However, that foundation enabled him to awaken the nature talent of the Resurrection Lily that he acquired. That nature talent of plants allowed him to expand on what he had built in his head, using that accumulated knowledge to form answers.

Inside his bag of the Cosmos, the portrait of the Resurrection Lily painted by Shui Dongliu was trembling. It seemed to be struggling, resisting, screaming a noiseless scream. This was because as Meng Hao continues to answer questions and corroborate what he had learned, the endless images of plants that appeared in his head were all being

plundered from the Resurrection Lily! He was wresting away the talent of the Resurrection Lily!

If that were simply it, perhaps it wouldn't be a big deal. However, as Meng Hao continued, he realized that the Demonic Core within his Dao Pillar seemed to be rotating. With every rotation, strands of invisible power would emanate out, entering into his mind, causing the nature talent from the Resurrection Lily to grow even more powerful.

This examination of plants and vegetation, was also a chance for him to steal away nature talent from the Resurrection Lily! There was no other method that could possibly be faster, that could push Meng Hao to such heights! This examination was essentially a huge stroke of luck!

He proceeded on, even more lost in thought than he was before. He continued to fill out more and more answers, more and more quickly. No one could hear the screams of the Resurrection Lily as its nature talent was wrested away and fused into Meng Hao, becoming his and his alone!

If someone asked Meng Hao to stop now, he would refuse.

His eyes were bloodshot. Sometimes he had to think, but he never made a mistake. As he thought and recorded his answers, everyone around watched with baited breath, stupefied at what was happening. Wang Fanming and the seven others exchanged glances. All of their eyes were filled with shock.

Some of the information Meng Hao filled out, even they would have difficulty with. Some of these hybrid plants required ten varieties of medicinal plants to be grafted together at different times to produce the final rare version.

Wang Fanming and the others exchanged excited glances and then began to transmit a conversation between themselves.

“One hundred thousand medicinal plants, one million variations, ten million hybrids. Three realms of plants and vegetations. Mastering even the first indicates one has the nature talent required to become a master alchemist...”

“In the Southern Domain, only Violet Furnace Lords have the enough talent to master the second realm. As far as the third realm goes, there are only three: Grandmaster Pill Demon and the other two Grandmasters!”

“Just how skilled is this Fang Mu when it comes to plants? He’s simply inhuman! He’s already passed the second realm and has now encroached into the domain of the third realm.... If his alchemic skill is comparable to his talent with plants, then he... he will be able to rock Heaven and Earth!”

“Not necessarily. His talent with plants is inhuman. But skill in alchemy is different. However, if he does possess some skill, then even if he doesn’t become a Violet Furnace Lord, he will surely reach the pinnacle of the Furnace Lord rank!”

“It will all depend on the results of his alchemy, and the level of the medicinal strength he develops. Ordinary master alchemists can produce about thirty percent. Only Furnace Lords can draw out fifty percent or more of the medicinal strength. Violet Furnace Lords can extract seventy percent. In all the Southern Domain, only Grandmaster Pill Demon and the other two Grandmasters can refine ninety percent or more! And Grandmaster Pill Demon is the only one who can concoct pills of one hundred percent medicinal strength, pills that do not lose any effectiveness!”

As the eight men continued their discussion, the apprentice alchemists watched on, dumbstruck. Their minds reeled as they watched Meng Hao. The other tenth-place finalists also watched on, some with admiration and respect, others with jealousy and discontent.

Time passed, and Meng Hao continued on without stopping. As the medicinal plants flashed in front of him, his expression slowly grew more and more excited. More and more information flooded into his head, and the legacy Demonic Core inside him rotated even more rapidly.

Meanwhile, elsewhere within the Violet Fate Sect, on an isolated peak deep within the East Pill Division, an old man sat cross-legged, observing a pill furnace which floated in front of him. He wore a white Daoist robe, and his entire person emanated the aroma of medicinal pills. His eyes

were focused completely on the pill furnace.

His features were not particularly impressive. However, his eyes were clear, like deep springs. At first look, his white Daoist robe seemed ordinary. However, on each sleeve was embroidered a pill furnace.

He was archaic, ancient, as if he had existed for countless years. As he looked at the pill furnace, he smiled. It was impossible to tell his Cultivation base, but his presence on the mountain seemed to cause the clouds to disperse and the wind to calm. It seemed that with him present, the world would always be like that.

Next to him was a young woman clad in a long, violet robe. She was consummately beautiful, although her brow was wrinkled in a frown. It was none other than Chu Yuyan.

The old man... was he who commanded high prestige and universal respect within the Violet Fate Sect. He was the Grandmaster alchemist whose name had dominated the Southern Domain for a thousand years. His two novitiates had forsaken him to become Grandmasters in their own right. This was... Pill Demon!

Demons can take countless forms, just like the variations of medicinal pills. The day this old man achieved his Dao, he took the name Pill Demon. This Grandmaster Demon whose name had filled the Southern Domain a thousand years ago, now spoke. "Were you able to concoct the Three Mortalities Pill?" he asked, shifting his gaze from the pill furnace to Chu Yuyan.

"I failed again," she replied, frowning. "Master, the Three Mortalities Pill is too difficult." She looked at the floating pill furnace.

The old man shook his head and chuckled. With an expression that seemed to be filled with the emotion of many years, he looked off into the distance, toward the enormous statue of Reverend Violet East. Eventually, he looked back to the pill furnace. After some time passed, he spoke again: "Your heart is unsettled, and is lacking in determination. It seems you still do not grasp the purpose for which Master asked you to concoct the Three Mortalities Pill. In that regard, you could really learn something

from him.” He pointed toward the pill furnace. As he did, the furnace grew blurry, then magically transformed into an image of the Meng Hao on the square.

When she caught sight of him, Chu Yuyan’s brow furrowed instantly. She remembered him. She recalled how seeing him had for some unknown reason caused her heart to fill with irritation. It had filled her with an almost unstoppable impulse to beat some sense into him.

Even afterward, she couldn’t explain it. Casting eyes on him again today caused that same irritated feeling to reappear.

“On the path of the Dao of alchemy,” Grandmaster Pill Demon said coolly, “talent is only an assistant. Unswerving determination is even more important.” He waved his right hand and the scene disappeared. The pill furnace was once again a pill furnace. “Go back. When you finish concocting the Three Mortalities Pill, then Master will permit you to leave the Sect.” With that, he closed his eyes.

Chu Yuyan’s lips curled into a pout. Clearly not happy, but unable to do anything about it, she stamped her foot as she turned and left. For some reason the face of Meng Hao, or rather Fang Mu, appeared in her mind, and her irritation rose again.

“I’m going to go see why this guy makes me so uncomfortable!” she thought, clenching her jaw and transforming into a beam of light that shot off into the distance.

Back in the master alchemist examination square, tens of thousands of eyes were all focused on one thing as the time slowly passed. When Chu Yuyan arrived, she saw Meng Hao, and once again frowned. She examined him intently for a while, but in the end, his features were unfamiliar. And yet within that unfamiliarity was something that she seemed to know.

More time passed. A day. Two days.... Eventually three days had passed.

Chu Yuyan’s eyes were glued onto Meng Hao, but in the end, her eyes filled with frustration. Much the same as Wang Fanming and the others, she was familiar with the third realm of plants and vegetation. Seeing Meng Hao answer question after question, how could she not be filled

with astonishment?

At the end of the third day, the screen in front of Meng Hao suddenly flickered. No more medicinal plants appeared. He slowly looked up.

Everything was completely silent. Everyone was staring at the screen in front of him. Wang Fangming gasped and stood up. The other old men also stood up one by one, their eyes filled with disbelief.

“He answered all the questions....”

“Grandmaster Pill Demon personally prepared all of the images of the medicinal plants. In one thousand years, no one has ever answered all the questions. What... just what inhuman talent does he possess...?”

As the words of Wang Fangming and the others echoed out, the excitement that had been suppressed for days by the surrounding apprentice alchemists suddenly exploded out. A deafening hubbub filled the air.

“No more questions.... How is that possible?!? He answered all the questions!”

“From ancient times until now, no one has ever done that....”

“Is it possible that this Fang Mu will become another blazing sun of the East Pill Division...?”

Even as the commotion filled the air, exhaustion washed over Meng Hao and he closed his dry eyes. He had no idea how long he had been sitting there. Once the screen went out, his energy seemed to disappear. The knowledge of plants and vegetation in his mind seemed to surge with life, buffeting up against and overwhelming any ignorance that might have existed before.

It surged again and again until finally it began to stabilize. Now that the ignorance had been broken, Meng Hao wasn't sure the extent to which his skill with plants and vegetation would grow.

He had attained... Instantaneous Formula Scrying!

By simply placing a medicinal pill in his hand, he would be able to see

the pill formula floating in his head. This was a realm that only Violet Furnace Lords could achieve.

Chu Yuyan took a deep breath as she stared blankly at Meng Hao. There was no doubt about it; just looking at him caused her to feel irritated. And yet, she had to admit that Fang Mu's skill regarding plants and vegetation was beyond human!

Chapter 219: Not Fair!

As everyone seethed with excitement, Meng Hao stood up. As he did, everything gradually grew quiet. All eyes were focused on him alone. Some filled with complicated expressions, some were purely envious, others were shocked or jealous.

A variety of expressions were directed toward Meng Hao, who appeared to be extremely worn out. He turned toward Wang Fanming and the others, clasped hands and bowed. Then, he left his workstation and found a place to sit cross-legged and meditate.

Wang Fanming took a deep breath. He glanced at Meng Hao for a moment, and then his gaze swept out across the crowd. "In twenty hours, the second round of the master alchemist promotion examination will begin. It is also the final round. Of the ten finalists, only one will become a master alchemist. The second round will consist of a test of the power of your catalyzing technique. You have twenty hours in which you may rest, but are not permitted to leave."

Chu Yuyan had been watching Meng Hao the entire time. The shock had still not left her eyes. Even though looking at him still annoyed her, she had no choice but to admit that Fang Mu was someone she had to look up to in terms of qualifications.

"Skill with plants and vegetation is only part of being an alchemist," she said, still unconvinced. "Let's see if this guy really is qualified to perform alchemy. That includes catalysis, as well as control of the spiritual energy of the Cultivation base. Those are not things to be taken lightly. Let's see if his skill in that regard is equally astounding." The more she looked at Meng Hao, the more annoyed she got.

Not a single of the thirty thousand apprentice alchemists chose to leave. They continued to converse in low tones. Seventy percent of the conversations were about Meng Hao. The other thirty were about the other nine finalists who had passed the first round of the examination, and thus revealed their talent, like awls sticking out from a bag.

These other nine were all very nervous. They sat cross-legged, using each and every moment to circulate their Cultivation bases. They wanted to be in peak condition to face the second and final examination.

Meng Hao's participation in the first round had crushed them down with a weight that made it hard to breathe. That having been said, there was no difference between first place and tenth. All would have a chance to pass the second round of the examination.

The second round was actually the focal point.

As far as they were concerned, there was still a chance to surpass Meng Hao. He might know more about plants and vegetation than them, but to catalyze medicinal plants required use of the Cultivation base, as well as significant practice. It demanded careful control of spiritual power; too much, and the medicinal plant would grow until it burst. Too little, however, and it would not grow healthily. It was difficult to find the perfect balance.

The nine other finalists breathed deeply as they sat in meditation. Images appeared in their minds from their years of experience catalyzing plants. Gradually, they began to fill with confidence.

Meng Hao sat there with eyes closed. Actually, he hadn't wasted very much energy from his Cultivation base. The main reason he was tired was not because of his body, but because of the effort in wresting away the legacy of the Resurrection Lily, as well as the rotating of the Demonic Core. His head felt like it was swollen. As he rested, his mind slowly began to simmer down.

Soon, the twenty hours had passed. Wang Fanming's voice suddenly rang out across the square. As he spoke, he moved his arm to rest on the pill furnace next to him.

"The time has come for the second round of this trial by fire. Would the ten final participants please approach!" As he spoke, the sound of furnace bells rang out, shaking the entire square. The eyes of the thirty thousand spectators focused intently on the proceedings.

The square was the same as before, but the thirty thousand workstations

had been replaced by ten stone pillars, each one roughly nine meters tall. As they rose into the air, they glowed with an eye-catching light.

With the exception of Meng Hao, all of the final participants leaped up into the air, alighting nimbly onto the stone pillars, excited expressions on their faces.

All eyes were on them; after all, these were people who had distinguished themselves amidst thirty thousand peers. Considering their talent, they quickly covered up their excitement, replacing it with looks of determination.

Meng Hao opened his eyes, and they shone with a bright light. The swelling pain in his head was gone. The nature talent of plants and vegetation was now completely amalgamated, and was a complete part of him.

“I WILL become a master alchemist,” he thought, his eyes shining with decisiveness. He stood up and strode forward. In a flash, he appeared on the final stone pillar. Instantly, everything grew completely quiet. Countless gazes came to be fixed upon him. Everyone would witness the promotion today and see... who would be promoted to master alchemist!

Whoever became master alchemist would instantly rise above one hundred thousand others!

In terms of status, position, remuneration from the Sect, and reputation, this person would no longer be in the same level as the apprentice alchemists. The difference between apprentice alchemists and master alchemists was like the difference between Heaven and Earth. After all, in the entire Violet Fate Sect, there were only about one thousand master alchemists. Later, if one could reach the realm of the Furnace Lord, then he could shake the entire Southern Domain. Any Furnace Lord occupied a lofty position in the Dao of alchemy; be it in the Violet Fate Sect or the outside world, they would receive utmost respect and veneration.

Within the whole of the Violet Fate Sect, there were currently only around a hundred Furnace Lords.

Eight of that group were Violet Furnace Lords. They existed just beneath

the three Grandmaster alchemists as the pinnacle representatives of the Dao of alchemy! All of the other great Sects and Clans thirsted to have any one of this group join them. They commanded extreme respect from one and all.

Everyone was watching as Meng Hao stepped onto the pillar. Wang Fanming and the others exchanged glances. One of the old men lifted his arm to push down onto the surface of the pill furnace. It began to emit a droning sound, and then opened up. Ten beams of light shot out and then came to rest, floating in mid-air.

The globes of light were blurry and indistinct, making it impossible to see what was inside.

“Ten different types of medicinal plant seeds, all of different categories. Candidates, make your selection. Whoever catalyzes theirs to the most mature degree, will be a master alchemist!”

With the exception of Meng Hao, the eyes of everyone on the stone pillars began to glitter brightly. They looked up at the ten indistinct medicinal plant seeds. It was completely impossible to tell what they were, causing the nine other participants to hesitate slightly. Then, one of them set his eyes in resolve. He lifted his hand and made a grasping motion, causing one of the glowing globes to shoot into his hand. It transformed into a blue-colored seed.

The other eight participants looked over. “That’s a Bluewater flower seed....” This flower could be used to concoct a variety of medicinal pills useful for the Foundation Establishment stage. It was relatively difficult to catalyze.

Without hesitation, the other participants reached up to lay claim to the various glowing globes of light. One by one, the globes descended into their hands. They looked around to examine which seeds the others had acquired. Some would be easier to catalyze, others more difficult. It would all depend on luck, considering that the differences between them all was not great.

After everyone made their choice, Meng Hao calmly lifted up his hand to

retrieve the last glowing globe. The light transformed into a gray-colored seed.

When the surrounding tens of thousands of apprentice alchemists saw the seed in Meng Hao's hand, they were sent into an uproar. "That's Flying Ash leaf...."

"Of all the ten types of medicinal plants, Flying Ash leaf is least complex. That Fang Mu got really lucky...."

"You can't really say that. It's not necessarily easy to get the leaf to turn into ash."

As the sound of the discussions rose up, unsightly expressions appeared on the faces of the nine other participants. No one said anything, though. After all, Meng Hao was the last person to take a seed, so he obviously had no choice in the matter. They couldn't accuse him of cheating.

The old man standing next to Wang Fanming also started when he saw the Flying Ash leaf seed. He exchanged a look with the other old men, but no one said anything. Suddenly, he spoke out in a cool voice which rose up above the hubbub that filled the square: "Begin!"

There was instant silence. Meng Hao and the other nine people on the stone pillars all focused on the seeds in their hands. They circulated spiritual power, then, using the East Pill Division technique, began to nourish the seeds with it. The medicinal plant catalyzing had begun.

After the space of ten breaths, popping sounds began to ring out from the hands of all the participants, including Meng Hao's. Sprouts appeared, swaying gently back and forth and slowly beginning to grow taller.

Meng Hao concentrated fully, slowly pouring out power from his Cultivation base. He didn't squander a drop. This convergence technique was what he had learned in the Blood Immortal Legacy tournament ¹. During the past months in the Violet Fate Sect, he had practiced the technique daily, especially when working with Li Tao. He channeled spiritual energy into the seed. Soon a gray-colored medicinal plant appeared in his hand, roughly two inches tall, with seven green leaves.

As it grew, gray veins began to appear within the leaves. “When the leaves turn completely gray, it means that the plant is fully mature. Eventually, the leaves will turn into ash. That ash is the true essence of the plant which is used as a medicinal ingredient.” Information regarding this particular medicinal plant appeared in his head, as well as ten hybrid variations.

The plant began to grow taller. It was now three inches tall, and the leaves were about half gray. Now it had twelve leaves in total, which was actually the maximum number of leaves that a Flying Ash plant could have.

As for the other nine participants, none of them had grown their plant past sixty percent; obviously theirs were not as mature as Meng Hao’s.

Their faces were dark and obviously filled with intense discontent. Even many of the surrounding tens of thousands of apprentice alchemists sighed. According to their understanding, it was obvious that Meng Hao’s medicinal plant was superior.

“This test really isn’t fair.... If that Fang Mu had gotten any other medicinal plant besides Flying Ash leaf, then it wouldn’t have been so easy....”

“It’s not necessarily unfair. The Flying Ash leaf might just be particularly suited to Fang Mu’s spiritual energy. If someone else got it, they might not necessarily find it so easy. Growing that particular plant isn’t simple. In fact, to cause the leaves to transform into ash takes more spiritual energy than most other medicinal plants.”

Voices began to echo out. The Flying Ash plant in Meng Hao’s hand made a popping sound. It seemed to be burning. A gray flame covered it, and then gray ash began to spread out.

When this happened, the surrounding nine participants faces tightened. Their eyes were red as they frustratedly looked at Wang Fanming and the others. Nervously, they began to speak.

“Seniors, this isn’t fair!!”

“The Flying Ash leaf that Fang Mu got is way simpler than my medicinal plant. If I’d gotten Flying Ash leaf, I could have done the same thing!”

“We worked hard for so many years for a chance at promotion. Don’t tell me that we lose, not because of skill, but because of luck!? Elders, it really isn’t fair!”

“Please, re-start the second round and give everyone the same medicinal plant. If we lose then, we will be sincerely convinced!”

*

1. Meng Hao learned to focus his power in chapter 123.

Chapter 220: Promotion to Master Alchemist!

Meanwhile, outside the square, on a mountain peak in the East Pill Division, Chu Yuyan's master, Grandmaster Pill Demon of the Violet Fate Sect, looked away from the pill furnace calmly and lifted his hand. There on his palm was a small pile of gray powder.

This was none other than some of the ash created by the burning Flying Ash leaf that had been catalyzed moments ago by Meng Hao.

Pill Demon lifted his hand and closely examined it, his eyes thoughtful. He then waved his hand, and the ash dissipated.

"No seepage of spiritual power..." he murmured faintly after a while.

Down in the square, Chu Yuyan silently watched Meng Hao along with the other nine complaining finalists. She wasn't sure why, but she felt somewhat pleased to see what was happening. The sound of all the condemnation piling up against Fang Mu was quite pleasant to the ear.

As the nine other participants continued to make repeated requests, Wang Fanming and the seven others looked at each other, brows furrowed. After a moment of discussion, Wang Fanming stood up.

As he did, everything grew quiet.

"If all of you truly desire to be completely convinced, well, Fang Mu, do you agree to restart the round?"

Meng Hao smiled. He said nothing, but simply nodded.

Wang Fanming nodded back in admiration. "Very well. In that case, we shall restart the round. This time, all ten of you will receive exactly the same type of medicinal plant. Those who do not win, will have no grounds for complaint!" He waved his right hand, and ten identical seeds shot out toward Meng Hao and the others.

The seeds were crimson, and emanated a plant-like Qi.

"Crimson Spirit sapling!" thought Meng Hao, his eyes glittering. The

hearts of the other nine participants trembled. They frowned as they examined the crimson seeds in front of them.

A collective gasp could be heard from the onlookers as they peered forward.

“So, it’s a Crimson Spirit sapling. That’s a medicinal plant useful for the great circle of Foundation Establishment. It has the appearance of a fire type, but actually, all types of spiritual energy can be used to nourish it.”

“Considering the level of our Cultivation bases, catalyzing a medicinal plant like that would be just too difficult...”

On the pillars, all the participants except for Meng Hao hesitated for a moment, then clenched their jaws and grabbed the seeds which floated in front of them. Then they used all the power of their Cultivation bases to begin catalyzing.

Meng Hao reached up and took the seed into his hand. He looked at it closely, then closed his eyes for a moment. When he opened them, a violet glow appeared in his hand, encircling the crimson seed. Spiritual power emerged, and the catalyzing began.

After enough time passed for an incense stick to burn, one of the middle-aged men on the pillars began to sweat profusely. His face was pale white, and his body trembled. However, he gritted his teeth and slapped his bag of holding to produce a Spirit Stone. He gripped the Spirit Stone in one hand and catalyzed the Crimson Spirit sapling in the other.

One by one, the other participants began to follow suit. An hour passed. Soon all of the participants, excluding Meng Hao, were relying on Spirit Stones to catalyze the plants. One and all had pale faces and bloodshot eyes.

Only Meng Hao looked as calm as ever. His gaze was fixed on the Crimson Spirit sapling as he carefully controlled his spiritual power. Not a drop leaked out. All of it poured into the seed of the Crimson Spirit sapling.

Clearly, none of the other participants were able to do such a thing. Of

all the spiritual power they sent out to nourish the medicinal plants, only thirty percent actually ended up being used.

Another hour passed. The man who had been the first to produce the Spirit Stone suddenly staggered. Face white as a sheet, he coughed up a mouthful of blood and took a few steps back. He stared mutely at the seed in his hand. He had expended all of his power and hadn't been able to produce a single sprout.

He shook his head bitterly and chose to withdraw.

Not much time passed before a second, third and then fourth participant left. By the time more than two full hours of the catalysis round had passed, only five participants were left.

It was then that a popping sound rang out, causing everyone to look toward Meng Hao's right hand. There in his palm, a sprout suddenly popped out from the crimson seed!

Moments later, a sprout popped out from the seed of one of the other competitors. This seed belonged to the man who had lasted in the first round of the competition longer than anyone else except Meng Hao.

His face was somewhat unsightly as he tightened his grip on the Spirit Stone in his hand and then gave Meng Hao a grim look.

As for the other three participants, their faces were white. Despite using all the power they could muster, they were still unable to cause the Crimson Spirit sapling seed to sprout. All of them withdrew.

The true test of the second round had arrived. Once again, it was a battle between the middle-aged man and Meng Hao.

"I prepared a lot of Spirit Stones for this part of the examination," said the middle-aged man, his eyes red. "There's no possible way that I can lose to you." The pillar he stood on was situated directly opposite of Meng Hao. He looked up and glared at Meng Hao, then pushed down on the space between his eyebrows. A roaring sound filled the air as his Cultivation base suddenly began to soar.

It flew from the eighth level of Qi Condensation all the way to the ninth,

the great circle of Qi Condensation! Clearly, he had been suppressing his Cultivation base the entire time, all with the intention of unleashing his true power in the end of the catalysis exam. In this way, it would only take one step to sweep past any opponents.

When the man's Cultivation base suddenly erupted, it caused quite a commotion among the onlookers. At the same time, the Crimson Spirit sapling seed in front of him slowly began to grow.

Meng Hao's expression was the same as ever. He didn't employ the power of his Foundation Establishment Cultivation base. He relied only on the spiritual power of Qi Condensation to catalyze the Crimson Spirit sapling. He completely ignored the middle-aged man, and in fact closed his eyes to focus solely on catalysis.

More time passed. Both Crimson Spirit saplings continued to grow taller. Several hours passed. By now, both plants were about the height of a person.

The middle-aged man's body quivered and veins bulged on his face. He had lost track of how many Spirit Stones he had used, and felt like he was beginning to grow crazy. As soon as a Spirit Stone was used up, he would produce another. His Qi passageways seemed unable to bear up under the strain, but he ignored them. Determination filled his eyes. He must win! He must become a master alchemist! For that, he would charge on regardless of anything.

Finally, blood sprayed from his mouth, and even as his body trembled violently, he pushed all out with his Cultivation base, which was now beginning to sink down in level. Spiritual energy which stemmed from his very life force poured out to catalyze the Crimson Spirit sapling. This instantly caused the plant to grow up about three meters. As of now, it no longer looked like a sapling, but instead a tree. The middle aged man staggered backward several paces, unable to continue. He had already risked his life, and to continue on would no longer be risking it, but delivering it up!

His Qi passageways burned as if with fire, causing his entire body to

spasm. Sweat poured out, and his Cultivation base continued to sink lower. Despite all this, his eyes glowed with loftiness and pride.

Amazed discussions instantly broke out among the surrounding apprentice alchemists. Even Wang Fanming and the others exchanged glances. Chu Yuyan nodded her head. Clearly, what he had done was no slight accomplishment.

“My Crimson Spirit Sapling had grown so tall it’s now a tree! Your sapling isn’t even seventy percent as tall as mine. Let’s see how you secure the master alchemist position now!”

For the first time, Meng Hao looked over at the middle-aged man. “I’m not finished yet,” he said coolly. The Crimson Spirit sapling in his hand slowly began to grow higher. From seventy percent of the height of the other man’s, it grew to eighty, then ninety.... In the time it takes an incense stick to burn, the middle-aged man’s face grew paler and paler. His body trembled, and his eyes filled with disbelief. Meng Hao’s Crimson Spirit sapling was now three meters taller than his.

Everything was completely silent. Everyone stared blankly at Meng Hao. They had already been astonished by his nature talent in the first round. Now, in terms of catalyzing skill, the results caused everyone to stare with deep shock.

However, Meng Hao still wasn’t finished. He stared at the Crimson Spirit sapling, his eyes blazing with determination.

“If I’m going to put on a show,” he thought, “I might as well go all out. I’m really curious to know how much I can grow the Crimson Spirit sapling with this catalysis technique!” Eyes glittering, more spiritual energy appeared in his palm, pouring into the Crimson Spirit sapling. Of course, he did not use the power of Foundation Establishment; he wanted to show off, but he wouldn’t forget himself in the process.

Six meters, nine meters... slowly, the Crimson Spirit sapling stopped growing up, but began to grow out instead. Thicker and thicker it grew until it was now a large tree!

This tree might not be amazing enough to attract the attention of the

entire world, but it certainly became the focal point of the entire examination square.

Meng Hao catalyzed the tree to such an extent that suddenly a single flower appeared on it, along with a fruit. It was a crimson-colored Spirit Fruit that instantly began to emanate spiritual energy.

When Chu Yuyan saw this, her eyes went wide and filled with an expression of disbelief. Wang Fanming rose to his feet, as did the other old-timers. Strange expressions filled their faces.

“The Crimson Spirit sapling is blossoming!! It’s bearing Spirit Fruit!”

“He’s a Qi Condensation Cultivator, but can do this? Inconceivable!”

The tens of thousands of observing apprentice alchemists couldn’t hold back; a buzz of discussion instantly filled the air. All the other participants who had failed stared blankly. As apprentice alchemists themselves, they were well aware of the significance of the Crimson Spirit sapling bearing fruit.

“Crimson Spirit saplings can be used to refine medicinal pills for the great circle of Foundation Establishment. But their fruit contain the essence of the entire plant; they can create medicinal pills for the early Core Formation stage!”

“I can’t believe Fang Mu did it! This technique can catalyze out all types of medicinal plants suitable for the Qi Condensation stage, and even some for the Foundation Establishment stage. But it’s impossible to use on medicinal plants needed for the Core Formation stage. And yet... he actually catalyzed Crimson Spirit Fruit!”

As the sound of conversation drifted in the air, Meng Hao took a deep breath and waved his right hand. The Crimson Spirit sapling abruptly trembled, as if it had suddenly lost its source of power. It began to wither. Even as it withered, though, Meng Hao’s left hand reached up and grabbed the Crimson Spirit Fruit. Without a moment’s hesitation, he placed it into his bag of holding.

The nine meter tall Crimson Spirit sapling was now completely

withered. Amidst the continuous buzz of conversation, Meng Hao hopped off of the stone pillar.

Wang Fanming took a deep breath, then gave Meng Hao a deep look and said, “The person promoted to master alchemist today is... Fang Mu!” His voice rang out across the square, and then seemed to enter the pill furnace and echo out throughout all the valleys of the entire East Pill Division.

All one hundred thousand apprentice alchemists heard each and every word!

Chapter 221: A Newcomer to the Dao of Alchemy

Time flashed by. Soon two months had passed. Meng Hao still resided in District One Valley One. However, he was no longer located next to the stream. On one of the mountains that formed the valley, a narrow path wound up to the peak, where there was an Immortal's Cave.

Clouds drifted past its green, stone door. Standing there, one could see the entirety of the valley below. The spiritual energy was much thicker, and within the mountain itself was a vein of fire.

This was the Immortal's Cave that had been bestowed upon Meng Hao after he was raised to master alchemist.

Only master alchemists could live in the upper reaches of the mountains. There, separated from the apprentice alchemists, they could enjoy the special privileges they had earned as master alchemists. For example, they could seek apprentice alchemists to serve as assistants. Furthermore, for slight compensation, they could acquire various pill formulas and even medicinal plants from the Sect.

The only demand placed upon master alchemists was that they meet the monthly quota of medicinal pills.

In order to receive less common medicinal plants and pill formulas, they would have to turn over a greater quantity of medicinal pills. The more they provided, the more they were rewarded.

After becoming a master alchemist, it was also possible to engage in trade with other master alchemists. All of this was designed to improve knowledge and familiarity with alchemy, and to increase the quality of the medicinal pills produced.

On this particular day, a roaring sound filled Meng Hao's Immortal's Cave. Despite the door being sealed, the sound still echoed out far and wide. Down in the valley, the apprentice alchemists held their tongues. They looked up toward Meng Hao's Immortal's Cave, unable to contain

their admiration and envy.

During the two months since Meng Hao became a master alchemist, this type of roaring sound could be heard frequently.

Inside, Meng Hao was covered with filth and grime. It was with a bitter laugh that he watched the pill furnace in front of him explode. He sighed, flicking his sleeve to collect up the bits of the broken pill furnace, and the remnants of the medicinal pill he had been concocting. He frowned as he sat there on the stone platform.

“Concocting pills is not easy,” he said. “The slightest lack of control of the earthly fire can ruin the pill and stress the pill furnace to the point of destruction. In the past two months, I’ve already blown up forty seven pill furnaces....” The sleeve of his long, black gown was embroidered with a tiny pill furnace. This set of clothing representing his status as a master alchemist.

“I’ve improved quite a bit, though. In the past two or three days I’ve only exploded one.” He looked at the seven or eight pill bottles lined up next to him, and his eyes shined contentedly. The pills inside these bottles were the accumulation of his two months of practice. They were only useful for the Qi Condensation stage, but the feeling of making something with his own hands left Meng Hao feeling very happy.

“Concocting pills is definitely not easy, and is clearly connected to latent talent. What’s even more important though is... concocting pills is expensive! No wonder there aren’t very many master alchemists....” Meng Hao sighed emotionally. He hadn’t felt this way back when he was an apprentice alchemist. When he had worked with Li Tao, he had only seen the respect given by outsiders, as well as Li Tao’s profits when he concocted pills for Inner Sect disciples.

After becoming a master alchemist, though, he realized that behind every truly successful alchemist existed a mountain of spent Spirit Stones. That was the only way to achieve true success. Of course, latent talent was also necessary; with only ordinary latent talent, the Spirit Stones necessary to succeed as a master alchemist could fund a small Sect.

“A pill furnace costs twenty thousand spirit stones... and that’s for the lowest level pill furnace provided by the Sect. And I’ve destroyed forty seven....” When Meng Hao thought of this, and the fact that he had to pay for all the pill furnaces, his heart ached.

“Pill furnaces are only one aspect,” he thought. “Concocting pills requires medicinal herbs, which are even more costly. Sometimes a single pill requires a combination of dozens of medicinal herbs. When you add them all together, it’s not cheap. That’s not the worst, though... What’s really killing me is... my success rate is only one in ten....” He took a deep breath as he thought of the whole situation. “The more expensive the medicinal plants, the more ancient the pill formula, the higher quality the pill... the more likely I am to fail.” He sighed emotionally.

“However, now that I’m a master alchemist, there are also a lot of perks. For example, this medallion.” He slapped his bag of holding to produce a white medallion.

It felt cold in his hands, and seemed to be made of jade... and yet not. A pill furnace was carved on one side, along with calligraphy that read “Blacklist.”

“Pill Blacklist!” Meng Hao looked at the command medallion, and his eyes filled with a strange light. This wasn’t the first time he had taken out the medallion to look at. Every time he did, his heart filled with a feeling of veneration for the position of master alchemist.

The Pill Blacklist medallion was a right given to all master alchemists by the Sect. Only one was distributed per alchemist, and could be used twice. It was the ultimate expression of the respect demanded by master alchemists, and was enough to strike fear into the heart of any member of the Violet Qi Division.

One of the main reasons that master alchemists had such a high position compared to the Violet Qi Division was because of the Pill Blacklist. The thought of being added to the Pill Blacklist would cause most Cultivators to feel an intense terror.

There was only one purpose to the Pill Blacklist. Any Violet Qi Division

disciple whose name was added to the list, would be refused service by all master alchemists for a time period of one hundred years.

This had been a Sect rule for countless ages, and a power possessed solely by the East Pill Division. This arrangement caused master alchemists to command incredible respect within the Violet Fate Sect.

Because of this, few would dare to offend a master alchemist. To offend one master alchemist was equivalent to offending them all.

The rule had existed since ancient times, and in the past one thousand years, had not been exercised by very many master alchemists. During that time, the list had never exceeded a few hundred people. Considering there were nearly ten thousand disciples within the Inner Sect, that wasn't a very large number.

To master alchemists, NOT using the Pill Blacklist made it that much more of a deterrence. After all, after the second usage, its effectiveness vanished.

The names of everyone on the one hundred years Pill Blacklist were branded onto the medallion. After becoming a master alchemist, Meng Hao earned the right to use the power of the medallion, but of course, was also required to respect the arrangement. Currently, there were thirteen people who had been Pill Blacklisted; for one hundred years, no master alchemist, Meng Hao included, would concoct pills for these thirteen people.

He looked at the Pill Blacklist medallion for a moment longer, then put it away. After a moment's thought, he retrieved a jade slip and branded it with some information. Then he ignited it; in the blink of an eye, it disappeared.

Not much time passed before he heard a voice from outside the Immortal's cave. He lifted a finger, and the door to the Immortal's Cave opened. A pretty girl entered who appeared to be about eighteen or nineteen years old. As soon as she entered the Immortal's Cave, her nose wrinkled as if she were gagging on the odor of the exploded pill furnace.

"Alchemist Fang," she said, smiling, "I was feeling a bit confused

yesterday. I was wondering why so many days had passed since you asked me for a replacement furnace....” She produced a brand new pill furnace from her bag of holding and handed it over to Meng Hao with a smile.

The girl’s name was Lin Rui, and she was in charge of daily affairs for master alchemists. Her Cultivation base was not very high, but according to the rumors, one of her Clan members was a Violet Furnace Lord. Furthermore, she had a pleasing personality. Therefore, many of the master alchemists had taken a liking to her. Over time, she came to take care of whatever the various master alchemists needed.

For example, during the past two months, she had delivered pill furnaces to Meng Hao on forty six different occasions. Today would be the forty seventh.

Feeling slightly embarrassed, Meng Hao cleared his throat. He accepted the pill furnace, along with a jade slip that she handed over. Now that he was a master alchemist, he didn’t actually have to pay up front for pill furnaces, medicinal pills, pill formulas. The Sect would provide them willingly. However, that didn’t mean that they were free. They could be acquired on credit. But eventually, he had to provide compensation in the form of medicinal pills.

“How much do I owe?” he asked, looking at the jade slip with a frown.

“Including today, you owe 6,757 Qi Condensation Pills to the Sect.” She winked at him, and covered her mouth as she laughed. Then she continued on in a conciliatory tone: “It’s not a big deal. You actually don’t owe very much. The most I’ve seen someone owe is 1,730,000. That much... would probably require a lifetime of pill concocting to pay back....”

Hearing the enormous number caused Meng Hao to stare in shock. Then he smiled wryly, shook his head, and sighed. He took out his own jade slip and inscribed the information on it, then handed the original back to the girl.

“Alchemist Fang, just keep working hard. Um... the most recent Pill Delivery Day has already passed. Do you think you could provide a bit more than the quota? If you do, it will make it easier to make an

explanation.” Lin Rui’s smile was like a flower. It was little wonder the master alchemists all liked her. Of course, Meng Hao was the youngest master alchemist by far, so every time she came here she would find opportunities to make fun of him a little. She seemed to love it when Fang Mu blushed with embarrassment.

Meng Hao sighed, then picked up one of the pill bottles. Inside were five Qi Condensation Pills. He handed them to the girl. It was his first time turning over pills toward his quota.

The girl covered her mouth as she giggled. She took the pills and left. Meng Hao watched her depart, after which he sealed the cave door. He held the pill furnace up in his hand and sighed.

“If things keep going like this, considering the level of my pill concocting, there won’t be any Inner Sect disciples from the Violet Qi Division who come looking for me. I’m not going to make any profits whatsoever, and I won’t be able to get any new pill formulas.”

The most important thing was to get invitations from Violet Qi Division Inner Sect disciples to concoct pills. So doing would provide more chances to encounter new pill formulas. The more invitations, the more pill formulas. Over time, his skill in alchemy would grow increasingly high. Not only would he be using medicinal pills that weren’t essentially on loan from the Sect, but also, he would make a handsome profit.

As far as the embezzlement factor, well that had basically become a rule. What could the Violet Qi Division do about that?

Meng Hao took a deep breath as he put the pill furnace down and picked up one of the pill bottles. He opened it up and looked at the medicinal pills inside. They were smooth and round, and spiritual energy wafted up from them. Meng Hao slowly began to frown.

“Perhaps there are some mistakes with my concoction techniques. If there aren’t, then how come it takes so much effort to concoct pills? When Li Tao does it, it seems so much easier.” Lost in thought and muttering to himself, Meng Hao stood up and began to pace around the Immortal’s Cave. Suddenly, he stopped, and his eyes began to glitter.

He lifted his right hand, and the pill furnace floated over. Eyes shining brightly, he slapped his bag of holding, and ten medicinal plants emerged. His hands flew as he catalyzed them and then extracted the sap from them. In the space of about ten breaths, he prepared all the ingredients and then placed them in the furnace.

He stamped his foot lightly on the ground, after which an area just in front of him began to glow red. An intense heat emanated out. He suspended the pill furnace about three inches above the bright red spot and began to gesture incantation symbols. The pill furnace then floated up a bit higher, and then lower, going back and forth at various intervals. Soon, a medicinal aroma filled the Immortal's Cave.

As it did, Meng Hao sat down cross-legged. His right hand then reached out and pushed down onto the pill furnace. He closed his eyes and began to pour spiritual energy into it, beginning another catalyzing process.

This catalyzing technique he had learned from Li Tao. Not only did it increase the medicinal age, it... was actually required for the pill concocting process.

Soon, Meng Hao's eyes glittered even more brightly. According to the changes occurring within the pill furnace, he adjusted things here and there. He occasionally added some medicinal plants, or removed sediment from the pill furnace. Previously, he had required ten or twelve hours to finish concocting, but this time, after only six hours, he flicked his sleeve and removed the pill furnace from the heat. He opened the lid, and as the medicinal aroma brushed across his face, he removed four Qi Condensation Pills from inside.

The pills were still soft, but as he removed them, they quickly began to harden, dried by the air.

"I was wrong..." He looked carefully at the relatively crude pills he had just produced, and picked up one of the pill bottles which contained another set of pills, ones he had painstakingly made to be as perfect as possible. After comparing the two types of Qi Condensation Pills, his eyes suddenly filled with enlightenment.

“These exquisitely produced pills wore me out. The medicinal strength is clearly much higher, perhaps seventy or eighty percent. The crude pills, on the other hand, only have a medicinal strength of about thirty or forty percent.

“My previous refining technique was too strenuous. If I had known that I could make pills like I did today, then I wouldn’t have wasted so many pill furnaces.” He was lost in thought for a moment as he put away the Qi Condensation Pills.

“Such a large difference in quality, about double.... Perhaps it has something to do with the time spent refining the pills. However, it shouldn’t have that much of an effect. After all, I’ve seen Li Tao concoct pills both for himself and others, and there is never much of a difference.”

Meng Hao frowned and muttered to himself for a moment, before his eyes finally glittered again.

“Could it be that it has something to do with my Perfect Foundation? My spiritual power belongs to me and does not circulate back into Heaven and Earth. It’s branded as being mine alone. My five Dao Pillars can trample upon the Foundation Establishment stage. When I use it to concoct pills, it’s infected with my Qi.... Maybe that’s why the pill furnaces kept blowing up, because the medicinal pills I was refining could be classified as Perfect?” His eyes continued to shine as he pondered the matter, eventually coming to the conclusion that his theory was correct.

He continued to think about the matter for some time, when suddenly, his expression flickered. He looked down at the bag of the Cosmos. From within the blood mask, the voice of the meat jelly transmitted into his mind. It sounded weak.

“I can’t hold on any longer! I can’t continue to support your transformation! Damn me, I knew I shouldn’t have lent my transformation power to others. Meng Hao, I need to shed. I’m finished! Finished! Ah, one month. I need one month. You need to ... make sure to ... be careful....”

The meat jelly’s voice grew weaker and weaker and then finally faded into nothing. As it did, Meng Hao’s features flickered, and his real face

returned.

As luck would have it, it was at this exact moment that the voice of Chu Yuyan could be heard outside his Immortal's Cave.

“Fang Mu! Open up your Immortal's Cave, I want to talk with you about something!”

Chapter 222: Signs of Rocking the Violet Fate Sect

Meng Hao's face tightened. All of a sudden, his features looked exactly the same as they used to. He was his old self, skin a bit dark, cultured and refined, with the air of a scholar. Within the scholar's air existed a touch of something demonic, and a hint of callousness.

Meng Hao frowned, neither lifting his head up nor paying any attention to Chu Yuyan's voice, which drifted in from outside the Immortal's Cave.

"Fang Mu!" she said again, her delicate brow furrowed. She had come with the specific purpose of thoroughly examining Fang Mu to find out why he irritated her so much.

However, the door to the Immortal's Cave was sealed shut. No sound emerged to indicate Fang Mu was inside. Looking far from pleased, Chu Yuyan gave a cold harrumph. Before coming she had asked around and determined that Fang Mu hadn't left his Immortal's Cave for days. Along the way, she had also encountered Lin Rui, who said she had just come from Meng Hao's after delivering a pill furnace.

"You close the door, don't come out, and won't even talk?" she said coldly, her eyes narrowing. "Don't tell me there's something you don't want me to know about, is there Fang Mu?"

Within the Immortal's Cave, Meng Hao frowned, continuing to ignore Chu Yuyan. He slapped his bag of holding to produce the blood-colored mask. He looked at it for a moment, then entered it with Spiritual Sense.

Within the world of the mask, he could see that the meat jelly seemed to have lost its shape-changing ability. It was no longer a parrot, but a simple rectangular slab of a meat jelly. It seemed completely lifeless, and some death Qi even rose up from it.

It was extremely hard to the touch. After examining it for a moment, Meng Hao extracted his Spiritual Sense and sat there thoughtfully.

"According to the meat jelly, because it lent me some of its

transformation ability, it now has to shed. It said one month....” He felt somewhat relieved. He could most likely last for a month, as long as he didn’t let anyone see him, and didn’t venture outside.

“Having Chu Yuyan outside is really annoying, though,” he thought, looking up at the large door of the Immortal’s Cave.

“Fang Mu, get out here right now!”

Meng Hao’s expression was the same as ever. He simply closed his eyes.

After enough time passed for an incense stick to burn, Chu Yuyan’s eyes began to burn with rage. Something seemed off, and yet she couldn’t think of any reason why Fang Mu would do this.

“Not going to say anything, huh?” she said. “Fine. If I have to, I’ll go get a door-opening medallion and then use it to open this door. I’m going to ask one last time. Fang Mu, are you home?” She slowly began to walk away.

“I’m not home,” he said coldly, an irritated look on his face.

Hearing this, Chu Yuyan stared back in shock. She had never imagined she would get such a response. She then took a deep breath. Taking one last hateful glance at the door, she turned and transformed into a beam of light that shot off into the distance.

Having dismissed Chu Yuyan, Meng Hao pulled out the lifeless, shedding meat jelly and placed it down in front of him. He looked at it for a long moment, then sighed and closed his eyes to meditate.

After leaving Meng Hao, Lin Rui returned to the Pill Pavilion, where she made a record of the medicinal pills Meng Hao had handed over. She wrote the character “Fang” onto the pill bottle, then placed it in a pile with the bottles she had collected from other master alchemists.

After that, she paid the matter no more heed. She left the Pill Pavilion. The Pills she had collected would be organized and then delivered to the Violet Qi Division’s Honor Guard to be distributed amongst Outer Sect disciples who were in the Qi Condensation stage.

Of course, before being delivered, they would be thoroughly inspected by

someone from the Violet Qi Division to ensure that all the medicinal pills were safe.

Time passed by slowly. Soon half a month was gone. Meng Hao was no longer so wasteful in his pill concocting, and actually saved quite a bit of material. No longer did his pill furnace explode, and he managed to concoct increasingly greater numbers of Qi Condensation Pills.

It was about this time that the Qi Condensation pills were taken from the Pill Pavilion and delivered to the Violet Qi division for their bi-weekly Pill Distribution.

Su Zhonglun did not have a very high Cultivation base. He was in the mid Foundation Establishment stage. Originally, he had not been a member of the Violet Qi Division, but rather an apprentice alchemist in the East Pill Division. However, in the end, he was unable to become a master alchemist. Furthermore, his Clan occupied a relatively low position within the Violet Fate Sect. Therefore, he finally decided to switch from the East Pill Division to the Violet Qi Division, and focus his Cultivation on magical techniques.

Because he had once been an apprentice alchemist, he had eventually been assigned to inspect the pills sent over for distribution. Only pills approved by him would be distributed to Outer Sect disciples.

He had been doing this for quite a long time. Furthermore, considering the pills he tested were merely Qi Condensation Pills, all Su Zhonglun needed to do was pick one up, and he would instantly be able to tell whether it was genuine, or a fake. In addition, he could very easily tell the medicinal strength of the pill.

On this particular day, the East Pill Division had just delivered a batch of pills. He sat, sipping some fragrant tea with one hand, and unsealing pill bottles with the other. One after another, he would open the bottles then place in front of his nose and sniff. It was a very leisurely task.

Behind him was a young servant who was responsible for keeping records and straightening things up.

“These Qi Condensation Pills are all pretty much the same,” said Su

Zhonglun with a sigh. "There's virtually no difference between them all. Well, they are master alchemists after all...." He picked up another bottle and unsealed the wax. Before inhaling the aroma, he drank a mouthful of tea. Then he slowly placed the bottle beneath his nose and breathed in.

As soon as he did, he suddenly stared in shock. He lowered his head and sniffed again. His eyes narrowed as he turned the bottle over and dumped the pills out into his hand. There were five of them, all Qi Condensation Pills. After examining them closely and smelling them again, a look of shock appeared on his face.

"These...." He suddenly stood up, overturning his cup of tea. He didn't even notice that, however. His attention was completely focused on the medicinal pills.

Behind him, the young servant looked on, dumbstruck. He had never seen Su Zhonglun act like this. This was especially true of what had just happened to the tea. Tea was one of Su Zhonglun's greatest loves, and if he himself knocked over a cup, would be punished. However, just now, Su Zhonglun didn't seem to even notice the spilled tea.

"The medicinal strength... how could it be of this level? Who concocted this pill?" Taking a deep breath, he picked up the bottle and looked at the character "Fang" inscribed on the side.

"Fang.... There are a thousand master alchemists, and I can think of three or four surnamed Fang. Which one is it?" As he muttered to himself, he carefully placed the five Qi Condensation pills back into the pill bottle. His eyes were shining.

"I can tell that these Qi Condensation Pills have a medicinal strength far beyond ordinary," he said, panting. "Too bad they're only Qi Condensation Pills. If they were medicinal pills appropriate for Foundation Establishment...." His eyes glittered as he shot toward the Inner Sect.

Naturally, there was no way for Meng Hao to know how much of a stir his handful of Qi Condensation Pills had caused. At the moment, he sat in his Immortal's Cave, frowning as he looked down at the meat jelly.

The meat jelly's body was now completely dry and lifeless, which made

Meng Hao a bit nervous. If it was still like this after the month had passed, then all the gains he had made in the Violet Fate Sect up to now would be for completely for naught.

The days passed, and Meng Hao's anxiety grew deeper. Several people had come looking for him in recent days, including Lin Rui and Li Tao. Chu Yuyan had come twice. Meng Hao had utilized various methods to stall them, but he couldn't keep it up for too much longer.

Thankfully, about twenty days in, cracks could be seen on the surface of the meat jelly. Every day, more appeared. Faint signs of life soon became apparent. Meng Hao finally started to feel a bit relieved.

After a few more days passed, there was only one more day until the month-long period was up. The meat jelly was now almost completely covered with cracks, and life force seemed to throb within it. Meng Hao could tell that the meat jelly was still inside, struggling to break out.

Meng Hao sat there quietly, waiting for the moment when the meat jelly would burst out from within the dried husk.

The night passed silently. The next day at dawn, dense cracks completely covered the surface of the meat jelly. Splintering sounds filled the air, and it seemed as if the re-born meat jelly would burst out at any moment.

Meng Hao couldn't do anything to help, he could only watch. It was at this moment that Bai Yunlai's excited voice could suddenly be heard from outside the Immortal's Cave.

"Fang Mu, quick, open the door! I have some good news. Really good news!"

"Sir," replied Meng Hao immediately, "I'm in the middle of concocting some pills. I can't really come out. Brother Bai, please wait just a moment. Once this batch is finished, I'll come out."

"Aiya! What pills are you concocting?" replied Bai Yunlai, his voice urgent. "Hurry up and finish. I managed to get some business for you from an Inner Sect disciple. He needs some medicinal pills, and I recommended you. If you concoct the pills for him, word will get around, and then more

Inner Sect disciples will come to you looking for business.” Bai Yunlai and Meng Hao had developed a very good relationship during the better part of the last year. Now that Meng Hao was a master alchemist, Bai Yunlai had been attempting over and over again to get some Inner Sect disciples to accept a recommendation for him to concoct pills. However, it had been difficult to get anyone to agree. As soon as he had, he’d rushed over to find Meng Hao.

Meng Hao laughed bitterly. Before, he would have jumped eagerly at such an opportunity. This was a very important step in his growth as a master alchemist within the Sect. Having just been promoted, he had to struggle to distinguish himself from the other thousand master alchemists. In the entire past three months, not a single person had come to him looking for pill concocting.

If he didn’t take advantage of the first opportunity, then there would never be a second....

Unfortunately, today....

Meng Hao was just about to open his mouth, when suddenly, his expression flickered. He looked at the meat jelly for the space of a few breaths. Outside, Bai Yunlai suddenly heard a thunderous boom from inside the Immortal’s Cave.

It filled the entire valley, causing the mountains to tremble. Anyone inside the valley would have been able to hear it, and it attracted quite a bit of attention. Bai Yunlai stared in shock. His ears rang, and it took a long moment for him to regain his composure.

He took a deep breath, and stepped back a pace, his heart trembling in fear. He had no idea what pill Meng Hao was concocting to have produced such an uproar. However, not much time passed before the door of the Immortal’s Cave opened. Fang Mu appeared from within, smiling.

“In my haste, I exploded the pill furnace,” he said. “But, that doesn’t matter. I have more. Brother Bai, let’s go!”

Interlude: What Meng Hao Relies On!

Before, Meng Hao had to rely on the thoroughly unreliable Patriarch Reliance.... How could he possibly have known that old turtle Reliance would take the State of Zhao and disappear like a streak of smoke to the Milky Way Sea, where he currently swims around happily... Who knows, he might even be seducing a big mamma turtle....

Later, the unreliable Demon Lord of the Blood Demon Sect appeared... He seemed happy to help, and also seemed pretty badass, but as soon as he caught sight of the meat jelly, he started shaking in his boots and then refused to appear....

Later a mysterious person appeared who seemed like Meng Hao's mother, or was it the mother of the Resurrection Lily? Her true identity really is a mystery....

And then there's that super badass Daoist Master of an entire generation, the one with the wicked cool name, Shui Dongliu. How cool was he? With the flick of a hand he painted a portrait and then spoke some bullshit Classical Chinese. After that he blathered some flattering ass-kissing words and pointed up to the sky, then ran off to who knows where to paint some more portraits....

Now, Meng Hao has reached the Violet Fate Sect, and has become Fang Mu. Suddenly, he's found himself without anyone to rely on....

Actually, what this kid Meng Hao doesn't know, is that what he can truly rely on is all you readers. Yes, you are what he can always rely on. You've been there as he has grown up, you've watched him try to pick up the girls, and you've seen him fight. Whether you read on your computer or on your phone, you've laughed and smacked your knee as you've read about the antics of the master con-man, Meng Hao.

Heyyy, since Meng Hao can rely on you, then that means Er Gen (and Deathblade) can too! Please, take a moment to show that we can rely on you, by donating monthly vote tickets to Er Gen (if you read in Chinese) or Spirit Stones to Deathblade (if you read the translation)! You can do it!

*

This was written by Er Gen. The last paragraph has some (minor) additions by Deathblade.

Chapter 223: How Alchemist Fang Carries Himself

Bai Yunlai looked at Meng Hao and said, "Should I find you an apprentice alchemist?" At the moment, Meng Hao's status was different than before. He was a master alchemist; regardless of whether he walked about in the East Pill Division or the Violet Qi Division, his position was much the same as an Inner Sect disciple. He was extremely important.

According to some of the long-standing rules of the Violet Fate Sect, master alchemists were equal to Inner Sect disciples of the Violet Qi Division. In reality, however, their position was a bit higher.

"There's no need," said Meng Hao with a slight smile. He descended the mountain with Bai Yunlai, then headed toward the Violet Qi Division. On the way, Bai Yunlai explained the situation. The person who had requested a pill to be concocted occupied a high position in the Inner Sect. However, despite being Chosen, he wasn't able to ask for help from a Furnace Lord. Furthermore, his reputation was not very good, so most master alchemists weren't willing to help him.

The East Pill Division occupied a relatively aloof position; any master alchemist had the right to refuse a request. If they did, the Inner Sect disciples of the Violet Qi Division would be helpless to do anything about it. This particular Chosen had very few other options. Of the master alchemists who were willing to concoct pills for him, none met up to his standards.

Bai Yunlai was aware of this, and figured that it was a good opportunity for Fang Mu. Even if it ended in failure, this Chosen couldn't do anything whatsoever against the East Pill Division. Therefore, Bai Yunlai had hurried over to find Meng Hao.

After hearing the explanation, Meng Hao thought for a moment and then asked, "What pill does he want concocted?"

"He didn't say. You can ask when we get there. My status doesn't afford

me the right to ask. In any case, Ding Yong¹ is a Chosen of the Violet Qi Division. He wouldn't answer me even if I did ask." Bai Yunlai sighed.

Meng Hao nodded. As they passed through the various valleys, the scene from moments ago played out in his head. The incredible noise had been caused by the meat jelly breaking out. As soon as it appeared in its reborn state, it surprisingly didn't seem interested in talking. It quickly changed Meng Hao's appearance back to that of Fang Mu's, and then flew back into the blood-colored mask to sleep.

Now, it slumbered just as the Blood Mastiff did. After a quick inspection, Meng Hao came to the conclusion that it would wake up in a few months. With that, he paid it no more attention. Then, it was with great excitement that he quickly gathered up the shed skin which had exploded moments before.

The shed skin was extremely tough. Even with Meng Hao's Cultivation base, he had no way of breaking even a single piece. Since it had come from the meat jelly, Meng Hao considered it to be a magical item. Not having time to examine it in detail, he had put it away and then walked out of the Immortal's Cave.

It didn't take long for Meng Hao and Bai Yunlai to reach the valley which connected the East Pill Division and the Violet Qi Division. Waiting for them there was an arrogant looking young man, who currently had his hands clasped behind his back and was looking up into the sky.

This was Ding Yong. He wore a red-colored robe, which flashed in the sunlight, and actually emitted a violet aura. The year Meng Hao had joined the Violet Fate Sect, he had learned that regardless of East Pill Division or Violet Qi Division, violet-colored Qi was to be treated with respect. Therefore, even though this young man didn't wear the violet robes of a Conclave disciple, the fact that his clothes emitted a violet aura indicated that he had a very high position within the sect. He was Chosen of the Violet Fate Sect.

His Cultivation base was at the peak of mid Foundation Establishment, just a hair from the next level.

When Ding Yong saw Meng Hao, he frowned and said, "So you're Fang Mu?" In his opinion, the older a master alchemist, the better. To him, Meng Hao was obviously much too young.

Meng Hao frowned coldly, stopping in place. During his time with Li Tao, he had grown accustomed to how the man handled himself in front of the Inner Sect disciples. The position of master alchemist was one that inherently demanded respect. However, it also required a bit of personal effort to earn that respect. If you set the bar too low, then others would assume your skill was lacking.

Therefore, he stood in place, then flicked his sleeve and let out a cold snort.

"Bai Yunlai," he said coolly, "from now on, there's no need to seek me out for such pill concocting matters as this." Without another look at Ding Yong, he turned and began to walk off.

Bai Yunlai often worked with master alchemists, and he was also very familiar with Meng Hao. How could he not understand what was happening? Feeling secretly pleased, he allowed horror to cover his face. Then he stared accusatorially at the target of Meng Hao's little tactic, Ding Yong, who stood there gaping.

"He's a master alchemist of the East Pill Division, it doesn't matter if he's young. He placed number one in the last promotion examination! Think about it! Out of one hundred thousand apprentice alchemists, only one was selected. You... Ai, you don't know how long I begged Alchemist Fang to come before he agreed. And here you...." Shaking his head, he turned to chase after Meng Hao.

Ding Yong laughed bitterly, then sighed. He was not like Qian Shuihen and Lu Song, who had been able to leave the Sect to gain experience. But how could he not see the way Meng Hao carried himself? When he thought about Bai Yunlai's words, he realized that this Fang Mu's skill in alchemy must be significant. After a moment's thought, a smile appeared on his face, and he walked forward a few steps.

"The grand name of Alchemist Fang has long since reverberated like

thunder within my ears,” he said. “Just now when I saw how young Alchemist Fang is, I was so shocked that I made a slip of the tongue. Alchemist Fang, please don’t take offense.”

Meng Hao stopped again, then turned to looked Ding Yong in the eye coldly. “What pill do you need?”

Ding Yong’s eyes glittered. Seeing Meng Hao speak in such a manner led him to believe that he must be a person with a relatively short temper. He quickly said, “Barrier Breaking Pill!”

Meng Hao’s expression was the same as ever, without the slightest bit of change. Seeing this, Ding Yong came the conclusion that he was obviously very worldly wise and eccentric. Actually, Meng Hao was currently frantically searching through his memory. Unfortunately, he had no information regarding Barrier Breaking Pills.

“There are at least seventeen pill formulas for that type of pill,” he said coolly. “Furthermore, there are hundreds of types of medicinal herbs that can be used, along with many complicated variations, three hundred ninety seven to be precise. The refinement process requires delicate adjustments, which further adds seventy percent to the total possible variations. Which particular version do you want concocted?” In truth, his words were a complete fabrication. Next to him Bai Yunlai gasped; actually, he too had been wondering what a Barrier Breaking Pill was. Hearing Meng Hao’s words caused a look of admiration to appear in his eyes.

The way it looked to him, the words seemed to come from a perspective of extreme comprehension. At least, that was the feeling he got.

It seemed even Bai Yunlai had been duped. Naturally, Ding Yong stared in shock for a moment before a bright glow appeared in his eyes. Meng Hao’s words struck him as being profoundly enigmatic. He took a deep breath, then clasped hands and bowed. Avoiding any careless words, he said, “Alchemist Fang, to be honest, I’m not really sure which type. I just have one pill formula, perhaps... you could take a look, sir?” He quickly retrieved a jade slip from his bag of holding which he offered to Meng

Hao.

Were Ding Yong not within the Sect, he might not be so easily bluffed. However, they were inside the Violet Fate Sect, and Meng Hao was a fellow Sect member. Furthermore, he knew that Meng Hao was a master alchemist who was in the upper hand. Therefore, Meng Hao's words truly had the desired effect.

Meng Hao accepted the jade slip expressionlessly, and then scanned it with Spiritual Sense. His face was the same as always, but inwardly, he was shocked.

"So, there really is such a medicinal pill. The Barrier Breaking Pill can actually only be consumed twice in a lifetime. If consumed a third time, instant death will result!

"The interactions of various medicinal plants, as well as the addition of various toxic vegetation, will create an explosive mixture that will stimulate the Qi passageways and give the Cultivation base the ability to break through a bottleneck!" Meng Hao was silent for a moment as he thought.

Next to him, Ding Yong watched on nervously. He had previously consumed one Barrier Breaking Pill. Unfortunately, at the very last critical moment, he had failed to break through. Now he only had one chance left. The worst of it all was that over the past years he had somehow managed to offend all the Furnace Lords and master alchemists. Even if one of them agreed, he wouldn't feel at ease with the results. He was still hesitant. To Fang Mu, this was a simple pill concoction. But to him, it represented his very, very last chance.

If he succeeded, he would be able to enter late Foundation Establishment. Therefore, he couldn't help but be cautious.

In reality, even after choosing to seek out Fang Mu, he still hadn't completely made up his mind about the matter. He still wanted to feel the situation out, then make a decision based on his feeling at the time. He desired a reliable master alchemist to concoct this crucially important pill. Ding Yong was no Outer Sect disciple. He knew very clearly that the

medicinal strength of any given pill would be different depending on who concocted it. Some people produced pills with high strength, others low. As far as Ding Yong was concerned, the medicinal strength of this Barrier Breaking Pill was crucially important.

The pill he had consumed previously had been of ordinary medicinal strength. Had it not, he wouldn't be here today, sighing as he was.

A long moment passed, before Meng Hao returned the jade slip. He muttered to himself for a moment before walking up to Ding Yong.

"Raise your hand."

Ding Yong gaped for a moment, and his eyes narrowed. However, he didn't refuse. He lifted his hand up, whereupon Meng Hao clasped his wrist and began to send a bit of spiritual power into him.

"Don't resist," he said coolly. He poured the spiritual power of Qi Condensation into Ding Yong, who looked hesitant as he stared at Meng Hao. However, he allowed the spiritual power to circulate fully through his body.

Meng Hao quickly became certain which level of medicinal strength was required of the pill that Ding Yong needed to break through his bottleneck. Meng Hao had also detected some other complex medicinal powers within Ding Yong's body. Those medicinal powers seemed to contain remnants of the Qi of the medicinal plants from the first Barrier Breaking Pill he had consumed.

"You've already consumed one Barrier Breaking Pill," said Meng Hao, retracting his spiritual power.

Hearing Meng Hao's words caused Ding Yong to take a deep breath. His eyes shined brightly as he looked at Meng Hao, shocked. He had never told anybody that he had previously consumed a Barrier Breaking Pill.

"I will help you concoct this pill," said Meng Hao calmly. "Prepare six sets of the medicinal plants required to make the Barrier Breaking Pill. In addition, I require thirty thousand Spirit Stones."

"I already found a few master alchemists who can make this pill..." said

Ding Yong slowly. “The most they asked for was three sets of ingredients and ten thousand Spirit Stones.”

“I guarantee that my pill will enable you to break through,” Meng Hao replied coolly. His tone was calm, but there also existed potent air within them.

“Are you serious?!” gasped Ding Yong, his eyes flashing brightly. He had long since come to the conclusion that this Alchemist Fang Mu was very different from the other master alchemists.

“If you don’t believe me, then never mind,” said Meng Hao, turning to leave.

Ding Yong’s heart twisted. It only took a moment for a determined look to break out on his face. Seeing how different Fang Mu was from the others, and how he had been able to detect his previous consumption of the Barrier Breaking Pill, caused him to make up his mind. Without any further hesitation, he produced a bag of holding and quickly put the required medicinal plants and Spirit Stones inside. He handed it to Meng Hao.

“In two weeks, at twilight, you may come collect your pill,” said Meng Hao. With the flick of a sleeve, he left with Bai Yunlai, his black gown fluttering in the breeze. A scholarly aura swirled around him, as did the faint scent of medicinal pills. He seemed otherworldly.

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1. Ding Yong’s name in Chinese is 丁勇 Dīng yǒng – Ding is a common surname that has many meanings. Yong means “brave”.

Chapter 224: Medicinal Pills Can Foster Life, Poison Can Exterminate It!

Bai Yunlai held his tongue for the entire way back. Finally, when they reached the door of the Immortal's cave, he couldn't keep his mouth closed any longer. "Fang Mu, your plan...."

"I need Spirit Stones," he said with a laugh. "I asked for six sets of medicinal plants because I plan to give a Barrier Breaking Pill to you. I can see that you've been stuck at the bottleneck of the eighth level of Qi Condensation for years now." He clasped Bai Yunlai on the shoulder, turned, and entered his Immortal's Cave.

As the door closed shut, Bai Yunlai stood there alone for some time. Finally, he clasped hands and bowed deeply, then left. His words of thanks were not spoken aloud, but imprinted on his heart.

Time passed. Soon seven days had gone by. Meng Hao sat cross-legged in his Immortal's Cave, looking at the three Barrier Breaking Pills in front of him. He picked one up and looked at it closely.

"The difference between medicinal pills and poison pills is a matter of will. If murder were on my mind, I could simply adjust the poisonous elements of this Barrier Breaking Pill, and then whoever consumed it would be exterminated. Even if that person was extremely prudent and had someone else test the pill first, I could figure out a way to cause the pill to initiate a self-change. Undetectable killing...."

Meng Hao sat there silently, thinking about all of the medicinal pills he had consumed over the years. At that time, he had no understanding of the Dao of alchemy. Thinking about it caused all the hairs on his body to stand up on end. Now that he knew more about alchemy, a sense of fear slowly filled him.

"From now on, I must only consume pills that I have concocted myself," he murmured. "As for pills from outsiders, I must employ my full knowledge of the Dao of alchemy to identify them before consuming

them. The difference between Dao of alchemy and the Dao of poison is a matter of will. Medicinal pills can foster life, poison can exterminate it. A true grandmaster of the Dao of alchemy is in actuality also a grandmaster of the Dao of poison.” Meng Hao closed his eyes, and within his mind appeared images of medicinal plants. There were endless varieties of plants that had poisonous elements. By combining certain ones together, lethal poisons could be created.

Based on the level of the Cultivation base, poisonous powders for pills could be made with different potencies. After thinking about it for a very long moment, Meng Hao slowly opened his eyes. They glowed with enlightenment. To Meng Hao, concocting this Barrier Breaking Pill had been a sort of baptism. He now had a much more profound understanding of the Dao of alchemy.

“Maybe one day when my skill in the Dao of alchemy reaches the level of Grandmaster Pill Demon, then I can dispel the poison of the Resurrection Lily myself!” His eyes shined brightly.

Slowly the glow faded. Meng Hao’s state of mind gradually grew calm. He had the feeling that even though he was still in the Foundation Establishment stage, with five Dao Pillars, when you added in his understanding of the Dao of alchemy, his battle prowess was now far beyond what it had been before.

In fact, if he created some poison pills now, then next time he encountered Zhou Jie, it would be easy to kill him, regardless of how many techniques his opponent used.

After more thought, Meng Hao took out the broken pieces of the meat jelly’s shed skin. He studied them carefully for a while. His time in recent days had not just been spent in pill concocting. He had also thought a lot about various methods of using the meat jelly skin.

It was exceptionally hard. He had used a variety of methods to attempt to damage it, none of which had been successful. He had even tried to refine it in the pill furnace, to no avail. Thankfully, although most of the skin had broken into pieces, some had exploded into dust, which Meng

Hao had also collected.

Meng Hao closed his eyes to think. “I have to think of a way to use this stuff in the future. Also, I can’t just focus on improving my skill in the Dao of Alchemy. I also have to improve my Dao Pillars. I need to gradually increase the level of the Cultivation base I reveal when I’m out in the Violet Fate Sect.” He frowned. “I need some formulas for medicinal pills useful in the mid Foundation Establishment stage.”

With that, he stood up and left the Immortal’s Cave to visit Li Tao. It was dusk when he returned. In exchange for the formula for the Barrier Breaking Pill, he had acquired the formula for a Spirit Platform Pill, which was appropriate for the mid Foundation Establishment stage.

Now that he had the formula, Meng Hao began to consider concocting it himself. He would only need one; there was no need to concoct more than that. As for the required medicinal plants, he was a master alchemist of the East Pill Division, so they could easily be acquired on credit.

Time flashed as seven days passed. On this particular day, Meng Hao’s eyes suddenly snapped open. He had just finished absorbing the Spirit Platform Pill that he had concocted a few days before. Unfortunately, refining the pill had used up several sets of ingredients, and in the end, the medical strength wasn’t ideal.

“I guess I have no other options for now, unless there are different formulas for the Spirit Platform Pill,” he murmured. “The rare medicinal plants for this formula can’t be acquired on credit, I have to pay for them up front. My only option now is to grow my reputation. That way, more Inner Sect disciples will come to me to concoct pills. My profits will increase, and of course my pill concocting skill will too. Then I can acquire more medicinal plants to use to concoct medicinal pills for myself.” With that, he waved his right hand to collect together the medicinal pills in front of him, then walked out of the Immortal’s Cave. By this time, it was dusk.

As soon as he left District One Valley One, he ran into Bai Yunlai. Today was the appointed day to meet with Ding Yong. The two of them chatted

as they walked to the designated meeting place.

Ding Yong had arrived early. He was nervous, but didn't show it on his face. He stood waiting; when he caught sight of Meng Hao approaching, his eyes glittered.

Meng Hao was as calm as ever. As he approached, he slapped his bag of holding to produce a pill bottle, which flew toward Ding Yong.

"You must not take this pill under the moonlight," said Meng Hao indifferently. "It should only be consumed at high noon, when the sun burns brightly. That is when the medicinal strength will be highest." With that, he turned and walked away, paying no further attention to Ding Yong.

Ding Yong took the pill bottle and stared deeply at Meng Hao for a moment. Without a word, he also turned and left.

The next day at noon, when the hot sun filled the sky, Ding Yong sat cross-legged on a wide stone platform in his Immortal's Cave. Various restrictive spells were set up around him. He breathed deeply as he produced the medicinal pill Meng Hao had concocted for such an exorbitant price. Ding Yong looked at, and a bit of hesitation flickered in his eyes. However, the hesitation quickly turned to determination.

"Fang Mu, if you pulled a fast one on me, then matters between us are not concluded!" He clenched his jaw, then quickly placed the pill into his mouth. Instantly, a roaring sound filled his mind, and his entire body began to quiver. Furious waves of spiritual energy exploded within him.

Time slipped by. Soon three days had passed. Ding Yong's body continued to shake. On the evening of the third day, his eyes opened, and as they did, the power of late Foundation Establishment stage rippled out from his Cultivation base, filling the surrounding area. His eyes shone with excitement, and he trembled as he rose to his feet. As he examined his Cultivation base, his heart surged. He lifted his head up and began to laugh with joy.

The laughter spread out, attracting the attention of quite a few nearby Inner Sect disciples. Soon, expressions of shock appeared on their faces.

“Ding Yong finally broke through!”

“He’s been stuck in mid Foundation Establishment for years. He finally broke through!”

News of Ding Yong’s breakthrough caused quite the uproar in the Inner Sect of the Violet Qi Division. Now that he had reached late Foundation Establishment, he had a chance for promotion to Conclave disciple. Considering how many years he had been stuck in mid Foundation Establishment, his breakthrough also caused him to suddenly be viewed as competition by many other disciples.

If the matter were limited to a simple breakthrough, then all eyes would be fixed on Ding Yong alone. After all, a late breakthrough is still simply a breakthrough. However, Bai Yunlai had been keeping an eye on Ding Yong’s Immortal’s Cave. As soon as he sensed that the breakthrough had been made, he immediately used all his skill and resources to spread word of it, and the fact that it was Fang Mu who concocted the pill.

It was in this fashion that he was able to borrow the momentum of Ding Yong’s breakthrough to rapidly spread word of Fang Mu’s skill in alchemy. Word spread like storm winds through the Inner Sect disciples. Within a few days, all of the Inner Sect disciples in the Violet Qi Division were talking about Ding Yong and Fang Mu.

When Inner Sect disciples went to master alchemists for pill concocting services, what was sometimes more important than alchemic skill, was reputation. The greater the reputation of the master alchemist, the more people would seek him out. Thanks to Bai Yunlai’s promotion, as well as Ding Yong’s breakthrough, the resulting ballyhoo immediately caused Fang Mu’s name to spread throughout the entire Inner Sect.

Ding Yong had no reservations about this. In fact, not only was he happy to allow Fang Mu to use his name to promote himself, but whenever people asked him about his breakthrough, he would directly explain that Fang Mu’s medicinal pill was what had led to his breakthrough in Cultivation base.

The reason for this was quite simple. A few words on his part could

verify how astonishing Fang Mu's medicinal pills were. This would prevent any cause of offense on the part of Fang Mu, and would build up good karma for the next time he needed a pill concocted.

It was in this fashion that Fang Mu's reputation slowly began to build among the Inner Sect Disciples. Soon, everyone knew of Alchemist Fang, one of the thousand master alchemists of the East Pill Division. However, Inner Sect disciples all had master alchemists of whom they personally approved. Mere rumors alone wouldn't cause them to switch to a new master alchemist for pill concocting, not even when combined with Ding Yong's breakthrough. Many were still hesitant.

Soon, the news reached the Violet Qi Division's Outer Sect, and the disciple in charge of pill inspecting, Su Zhonglun. His eyes began to shine. For a month now he had been wondering about the master alchemist surnamed Fang. He had gone to the Pill Affairs Pavilion in the Inner Sect for information but had come up empty-handed. After that, every time medicinal pills arrived in the Outer Sect, he would inspect them very carefully. However, he never saw any more pills marked Fang. This caused him to sigh endlessly.

He had saved the original bottle of pills, and frequently took them out to study. The more he did, the more admiration grew in his heart, and the more curious he grew regarding the identity of this Alchemist Fang. When the news about Fang Mu and Ding Yong reached him, he was immediately eighty percent sure that Fang Mu was the person he had been looking for.

He instantly rushed out of the Outer Sect and headed toward the East Pill Division. He tracked down Bai Yunlai and begged him to recommend him to Fang Mu.

During these days, Meng Hao was well aware of all that Bai Yunlai was doing to spread his name. He sat patiently waiting for requests to come in, yet none did, which caused him to frown.

It was at this moment that Su Zhonglun's request for a pill came in. Meng Hao was immediately enlivened, and sent his response.

A few days later, Su Zhonglun received the medicinal pills he needed. He

immediately returned to his room. After doing some breathing exercises, he thoroughly examined the pill. As he did, his eyes began to shine more and more brightly. In the end, he was panting.

“I provided medicinal plants with fifty percent strength, and this pill also has fifty percent strength. Only a Furnace Lord could mix the various medicinal plants together to create a medicinal pill like this. Ordinary master alchemists could never do it. At the most, they could create a pill with thirty percent medicinal strength. This is astonishing! This Fang Mu... he’s only a master alchemist, but he can concoct the medicinal pills of a Furnace Lord!” Unable to contain his excitement, he held up the fifty percent strength medicinal pill and then placed it into his mouth. A few hours later, he opened his eyes.

Chapter 225: Rising to the Pinnacle!

“If you consume one type of medicinal pill too often, it will become less and less effective. This is result of problems with the medicinal plants within the pill. Therefore, a medicinal pill like this with fifty percent medicinal strength, well, its true value can only be imagined!” Now that he had personally confirmed his conjectures regarding Fang Mu, he quickly decided that he need to become friends.

“It is a foregone conclusion that he will rise to the pinnacle. At the moment, though, his reputation is still growing and lots of people are hesitating. Helping him now will definitely be a way to build up good karma for the future!” Su Zhonglun’s line of thinking was the same as Ding Yong’s. The difference was that he had a much better understanding of Fang Mu’s ability with plants and vegetation, as well as his skill in concocting medicinal pills, and, the value thereof.

A new commotion rose up among the Inner Sect disciples of the Violet Qi Division. This was because Su Zhonglun, although he hadn’t made a breakthrough, had made significant progress in his Cultivation base. Furthermore, he repeatedly talked about Fang Mu’s pills within the Inner Sect. In fact, he would even pull out two of the same type of medicinal pill, one concocted by Fang Mu, one concocted by another master alchemist. Then he would compare the two, point by point.

First was Ding Yong, and then Su Zhonglun. Their recommendations, coupled with the waves spread by Bai Yunlai’s promotion, caused all of the discussion within the Inner Sect over the next half month to revolve around Fang Mu.

Finally, more and more Inner Sect disciples began to seek out Fang Mu to concoct pills.

At first, it was just a disciple here and there. They were hesitant, and clearly just wanted to test the waters. They would seek out Bai Yunlai, whereupon he would recommend Fang Mu’s services.

Meng Hao didn’t refuse anyone who came for pill concocting services.

When his pill furnace exploded under the strain of such frequent use, he would immediately get a replacement.

The first group of three or four Inner Sect disciples who came to him for pills came back a few days later and took their purchases back to their Immortal's Caves.

Zhang Shuilai, who was at the early Foundation Establishment stage, was one of them. He wasn't very prominent among the Inner Sect disciples, and had only sought out a master alchemist once before for pill concoction. After experiencing how impressive they were, he was deeply moved. Unfortunately, he was embarrassingly short of Spirit Stones, and could only afford to acquire pills during the Sect's Pill Distribution.

The reason he sought out Fang Mu's services was because he could tell that Fang Mu's name was on the rise. This might be his only opportunity, so he decided to take advantage of it while he could

He sat in his Immortal's cave, holding a pill bottle. Inside were ten medicinal pills useful for the early Foundation Establishment stage. He took a deep breath, and put one of the pills into his mouth. Almost immediately, his eyes grew wide, and filled with the glow of disbelief. He looked down at the rest of the medicinal pills. Just looking at them, they didn't seem any different from any of the other pills he had consumed in the past.

A long while passed. After absorbing the power of all the pills, Zhang Shuilai took a deep breath. He produced yet another pill bottle. Inside were two pills useful for the early Foundation Establishment stage. After examining them closely, he consumed them. A few moments later more disbelief filled his eyes.

"What's going on? The pills the master alchemist concocted for me before didn't do much. They just transformed into spiritual energy. But... but... Fang Mu's medicinal pills are incredibly potent! They created more than fifty percent more spiritual energy than the others!" He panted, and his eyes shone. If at this point he didn't realise what was going on, then he didn't deserve to be an Inner Sect disciple.

Without the slightest hesitation, he leaped up and rushed out of the Immortal's Cave and headed directly to find Fang Mu. He would take advantage of others' hesitation to have more pills concocted.

However, as soon as he neared the East Pill Division, he found that the other Inner Sect disciples who had recently picked up pills from Fang Mu apparently all had the same idea as him. They were all returning, excited expressions on their faces. The group all exchanged glances, then wordlessly shot together to the East Pill Division to find Bai Yunlai.

Before, they had been interested in simply trying out the pills; now, things were clearly different.

They did not possess Su Zhonglun's ability to identify and analyze medicinal pills. However, after consuming them, they immediately realized that Meng Hao's medicinal pills were beyond ordinary. You could say that if other master alchemists could create pills of one hundred percent strength, then Meng Hao's were was one hundred and fifty percent strength. They were at least fifty percent stronger, which of course made these Inner Sect disciples incredibly happy.

What they didn't know was that Meng Hao's medicinal pills were not just fifty percent stronger in terms of medicinal strength. In the world of alchemic Cultivation in all of the Southern Domain, the medicinal pills concocted by master alchemists never exceeded roughly thirty percent medicinal strength. The rest of the strength was lost in the concocting process. In the end, the medicinal pills they created were not complete. On the other hand, Meng Hao could concoct pills of fifty percent medicinal strength. It was instantly apparent who was in the superior position and who was not.

Fang Mu's imminent explosive popularity among the Inner Sect disciples was obvious.

The news that the first group of Inner Sect disciples returned for more pills quickly spread. Soon Bai Yunlai didn't need to do any promotion whatsoever. Rumors passed between friends inside the Inner Sect, and soon more and more disciples came looking for pill concocting. It wasn't

long before the spreading word caused Meng Hao's name to rise above that of the other master alchemists. His reputation grew and grew.

"Did you hear? The East Pill Division has a master alchemist named Fang Mu. The pills he creates are twice as effective as the pills created by the other master alchemists!"

"How is that possible? I don't cultivate the Dao of Alchemy, but I've dealt with a lot of different master alchemists, so I know what I'm talking about. Unless this Fang Mu is a Furnace Lord, there's no way his pills could be that much more effective in comparison."

"Hahaha! All you have to do is try them out, then you'll know whether you're right or not. Have him make a pill for you, then you'll know." Conversations similar to this could be heard throughout the Inner Sect of the Violet Qi Division.

Eventually, people began to seek out Bai Yunlai every single day.

According to the rules of the East Pill Division, outsiders were not allowed to enter. The only way to seek out master alchemists was to use messaging jade slips. However, Meng Hao did not have any direct contact with anyone, only Bai Yunlai did.

More and more Inner Sect disciples arranged to visit Bai Yunlai. Soon, he was starting to get more work than he could deal with. Meng Hao was surprised by this turn of events. Soon, he was spending almost all his time concocting pills. It was getting to the point where he couldn't keep up. It was a happy sort of pain. Because of the volume of pills he was concocting, his Dao of alchemy advanced by leaps and bounds. Furthermore, he was acquiring a large amount of pill formulas, and was also building up quite a store of medicinal plants which he acquired from the excess ingredients provided.

Things only continued to grow more and more intense. After two months, every single Inner Sect disciple in the Violet Qi Division knew about Fang Mu. The whole place was abuzz. Anyone who had the mind to try one of Meng Hao's medicinal pills would immediately be astounded, and would return for more.

More than a few acquired sample pills by trading with others. Others relied on the word of others and would without hesitation seek out Bai Yunlai.

Soon Meng Hao had reached the point where he simply had too much work to do. Pumping out so many medicinal pills was driving him to exhaustion. Therefore, he discussed matters with Bai Yunlai and decided to raise prices!

He arranged a pricing system with different values assigned to different types of medicinal pills. The prices were obviously higher than other master alchemists'. This had been Bai Yunlai's idea, which Meng Hao had approved of. What neither of them had expected was that raising the prices actually caused his popularity to rise. Both of them were stupefied.

More and more Inner Sect disciples came, which was now causing complaints among the other master alchemists. However as soon they took time to study Meng Hao's medicinal pills, the complaints disappeared....

The reason Meng Hao was so incredibly popular was because of the fifty percent medicinal strength of his pills. To the Inner Sect disciples, the benefits of consuming such pills went without saying.

Most importantly, in the entire East Pill Division, the only other people whose skill in the Dao of alchemy was enough to produce pills of fifty percent medicinal strength, were Furnace Lords.

However, Furnace Lords would not concoct pills for Inner Sect disciples, only Conclave disciples. With the appearance of Meng Hao, suddenly, all Inner Sect disciples had the chance to get medicinal pills of Furnace Lord quality, but at the price of a master alchemist. After all, they could only make requests of Meng Hao, and not the Furnace Lords.

Therefore, even after raising prices, Meng Hao's medicinal pills were still cheaper than those concocted by Furnace Lords. As such, Inner Sect disciples could accept the higher cost.

Fang Mu was all the rage!

His name wasn't just popular within the Inner Sect of the Violet Qi Division. The apprentice alchemists of the East Pill Division were all talking about his shocking promotion to master alchemist. Eventually, Fang Mu's name reached the ears of some of the Elders of the Violet Fate Sect, causing them to take note of the situation.

Many of the master alchemists in the East Pill Division were still not resigned to the situation. Through various methods, they were able to acquire some of Meng Hao's medicinal pills, which they researched thoroughly. Their research left them astonished. More and more master alchemists participated in the research. In the end, when Meng Hao raised his prices, the orders Bai Yunlai accepted only increased.

Over the course of a few months, Meng Hao had acquired hundreds of pill formulas. The Spirit Stones were rolling in, and his stores of medicinal plants were plentiful. Meng Hao was happy, although now he had almost no personal time. Each day, every day, he concocted pills. When his spiritual power began to dry up, he would consume some medicinal pills to recover. Over the months, his sixth Dao Pillar came to be roughly half complete.

One can only imagine his life during these few months....

Finally, it reached the point that Meng Hao really didn't think it was possible to complete all the orders. Finally, he made a new decision. He had Bai Yunlai make an announcement that only three orders would be processed per day.

He really had no other option than this. The proclamation of this rule brought instant results. Not a few complaints were voiced, and malicious talk spread. Despite that, the rules of three orders per day stood. There were no rest days. The Inner Sect disciples of the Violet Qi Division came up with various methods to secure spots among the three orders per day.

Chapter 226: Liu's Rule!

Fang Mu had risen to prominence within the Violet Fate Sect. There was not a single Inner Sect disciple in the Violet Qi Division who didn't know of him. The name of this newly promoted master alchemist reverberated like thunder in the ears of the other master alchemists of the East Pill Division.

Considering the situation with the Inner Sect disciples and the master alchemists, there is no need to even mention the Outer Sect disciples and the apprentice alchemists. The name of Alchemist Fang Mu swept across the Sect like a raging wind, and his prestige among the Violet Sect Disciples only grew greater.

Speculation began to run wild regarding Fang Mu. The general consensus was that he had an eccentric personality, didn't speak much, didn't like to go out or engage in social activities. In truth, very few people actually knew what he even looked like.

All requests for medicinal pills went through Bai Yunlai. As for Fang Mu, although everyone knew his name, no one ever had the opportunity to meet him. Because of the rules of the East Pill Division prohibiting the intrusion of Violet Qi Division disciples, Fang Mu became an increasingly mysterious figure.

This, in addition to his rule of only three orders per day, the results of which were equivalent to the work of Furnace Lords, only served to increase his reputation.

In fact, the rule of three orders per day had caused the Inner Sect disciples to create a trade system, in which prices continued to increase.

At this particular moment, deep within the East Pill Division, was a violet-colored mountain peak. The peak was not very high, and in fact was somewhat concealed by the surrounding peaks. However, an indescribable Qi existed here which made it clear that while the mountain was not tall, it served as the heart of the entire mountain range.

Sitting atop this mountain was an old man. In front of him was a

worktable, upon which lay a medicinal pill. He looked at it, his eyes glowing with a strange light. Behind this old man were three other persons.

These people were by no means young. All of them had Cultivation bases at the Nascent Soul stage. However, it seemed as if they didn't dare to breathe too loudly in front of the other old man. Their expressions were filled with respect.

This old man was none other than Chu Yuyan's master, Grandmaster Pill Demon, whose name could rock the entire Southern Domain.

He examined the medicinal pill in front of him for some time. Soon, the sun began to set. Finally, he slowly waved his hand and picked up the pill.

"Interesting," he said, then began to laugh. He closed his hand over the pill and rubbed it. When he opened his hand again, ash drifted out into the wind.

One of the three men behind Grandmaster Pill demon hesitated for a moment, then quietly said, "Pill Demon, there is discontent within the Violet Qi Division...."

"Discontent?" said Pill Demon coolly. "Let them be patient. If anyone causes problems for the disciples of the East Pill Division, they will be cut off from medicinal pills for ten years." With that, he flicked his sleeve and disappeared.

The three men exchanged glances. With bitter smiles, they bowed to the position Pill Demon had just occupied, then turned and left.

Beneath the evening sky, behind the short, violet-colored mountain was a towering peak which stretched up to the sky. Half way up the mountain was a pavilion, the greater part of which stretched out of the mountain to hang in mid-air. During the day, you could stand here to look out across the land. At nighttime, when the stars came out, it almost seemed possible to reach up and touch the sky.

This particular evening, the rays of the setting sun fell across everything, creating a languid atmosphere. The golden glow combined with the rosy

clouds on the horizon led to a scene of incredible beauty.

Within the pavilion, the evening air stirred. The wind did not disperse the clouds, but did send strands of long, black hair drifting into the wind. The hair belonged to none other than Chu Yuyan.

She stood quietly within the pavilion, her hair dancing in the wind. Her brow was furrowed slightly as she lifted her hand up. There in her palm was a medicinal pill.

“How did he concoct it....” she thought. “Could it be that his aptitude with the Dao of alchemy is similar to his latent talent with plants and vegetation...? Is there really someone so gifted in the Dao of alchemy? It’s breathtaking....”

The pill was waxen and yellow, and did not seem to be a complete product.

By expending some Spirit Stones, she had been able to purchase a pill from an Inner Sect disciple. Of course, that medicinal pill had been the handiwork of Meng Hao.

After getting ahold of the pill, Chu Yuyan’s first reaction was that of disdain. But, then she had studied it fastidiously. As she did, her expression changed. In the end, she stared wide-eyed and disbelieving.

After studying the pill for seven days, she had eventually ground it into powder. After such thorough examination, although she still felt annoyed at the thought of Fang Mu, she couldn’t help but admit that as for this medicinal pill... even she could only create it if she devoted her complete mind and spirit to the task.

Finally, she had used Grandmaster Pill Demon’s unique method to re-concoct the pill. She had taken the powder of the original pill to form a second pill. After the second refinement, the pill’s medical strength was actually sixty percent. That was her limit.

“If he learned my master’s refinement technique,” she murmured softly, “who knows what level of medicinal pills he would be able to concoct...?” She looked off at the rosy clouds in the distance, then back down at the

pill in her hand.

“Master said that he might hold the secret to enlightenment regarding the Three Mortalities Pill. But he’s so arrogant! Last time I went to visit he locked himself inside and refused to come out!” Thinking of this made her more annoyed. Even the mere name of Fang Mu would cause her temper to boil up with irritation.

“This Fang Mu’s detestableness is second only to that damned Meng Hao!” she said, gnashing her teeth. Clearly, the two people she hated most in her heart were Meng Hao, first, and Fang Mu, second.

However, she still didn’t know why Fang Mu caused her so much irritation. Of course, if she knew that Fang Mu and Meng Hao were one in the same, then she would immediately understand why.

At the same time that Chu Yuyan was muttering to herself, Meng Hao sat in front of his pill furnace concocting a batch of medicinal pills. A roaring sound could be heard, filling the Immortal’s Cave. Meng Hao sighed. The past few months, he had spent every day concocting pills. He was just now finishing with all the pills he owed to various members of the Inner Sect. The pill furnace in front of him was reaching the end of its life; it would definitely crack to pieces soon.

Meng Hao rubbed the bridge of his nose, then opened the door of his Immortal’s Cave to look at the sunset. He took a deep breath. The mountain breath carried the chill of autumn. As he breathed it in, the tension slowly eased from his painfully swollen head.

“Once I finish with all the old orders, then all I have to worry about are the three orders per day, as well as the medicinal pills I need for my personal Cultivation. Spirit Platform Pills are already only nominally effective. If I concoct anything, it should be a Foundation Establishment Day!” His eyes glittered. Foundation Establishment Day was a medicinal pill suitable for the late Foundation Establishment stage. It was an incredibly potent pill, one of the most valuable types in all of the Violet Fate Sect for the Foundation Establishment stage.

Recently, Meng Hao had refined over a thousand batches of pills, and

had acquired hundreds of formulas. One of them was the formula for Foundation Establishment Day. After some research, he'd come to the conclusion that in order to make any progress, he would have to rest some, then use all his skill to concoct a Foundation Establishment Day with at least ninety percent medicinal strength.

With such a pill, he could complete his sixth Dao Pillar and begin formation of the seventh.

"It's too bad that the Violet Qi from the East manual is only available to Furnace Lords. It's a legendary art, and there's no other way to get a look at it. Careful records are kept of everyone who studies it." Lost in thought, Meng Hao strolled down the mountain. This was the first time in a long time that he had been outside.

"Even Inner Sect disciples aren't qualified to consult the Violet Qi from the East manual. They are forced to cultivate based on speculations. Only Conclave disciples of the Violet Qi Division or Furnace Lords can personally peruse the real manual to study the technique." Meng Hao was determined to gain access to it. Only in this way could he prepare to form a Violet Core. With that foundation, he could consume the pill to form the Perfect Gold Core.

"I've searched some for the medicinal plants required for the Perfect Gold Core, but am still missing quite a bit. Once I become a Furnace Lord, it should become a bit easier." Meng Hao passed through various valleys, lost in thought. Along the way, he ran into quite a few apprentice alchemists. Some of them recognized him, and stared in amazement. Then their faces would fill with excitement.

After all, thirty thousand apprentice alchemists had watched him be promoted to master alchemist. It was no surprise that many would recognize him still. However, now that he was a master alchemist, they didn't dare to stop and chat with him. Instead, they simply saluted respectfully.

Meng Hao wanted to find a quiet place to think. After smiling in response to the apprentice alchemists, he disappeared in a flash. He left

the mountains and valleys of the East Pill Division to enter the Violet Qi Division.

Here, very few people would recognize him. He walked happily amidst the mountains, wearing his master alchemist's robe. No one stopped to question him, so he proceeded along quietly.

As he strolled, he looked around at the scenery. He had been in the Violet Fate Sect for roughly three years. Although he was relatively familiar with it, it was actually a very large place. There were many areas he had never been to. As he walked, he suddenly heard the sound of an argument in which his name was being mentioned

"That Fang Mu is definitely fishing for fame and compliments. He thinks his pills are so amazing, so he wants to make trouble for us. We can't accept it! I already reported to the Elders about it and they're going to get in touch with the people from the East Pill Division. Fang Mu will be punished! As for you, you measly apprentice alchemist, you had best apologize for your offense!"

"Elder Brother Liu, please calm your anger. This is my fault. However, it really is true that the next ten days or more worth of orders have already been filled..."

There was a jumble of conversation, then laughter. Meng Hao listened to a few sentences and was certain that one of the voices belonged to Bai Yunlai. He walked around an ornamental rock formation into a wide public square within which could be seen four pagodas.

Within pagodas sat a handful young men who were all looking at the square, where could be seen a few dozen Violet Qi Division Inner Sect disciples.

The young men sitting in the pagodas were not ordinary disciples, but Chosen of the Violet Qi Division. There were four pagodas in total, and four Chosen, one in each Pagoda.

The handful of people who stood in the square, were scattered about, with Bai Yunlai in the middle. A blue-robed young man was currently pointing at himself and swearing at Bai Yunlai contemptuously.

“My words might not be rules in the Sect, but as far as you’re concerned, they are! If I tell you to slap yourself on the face and apologize, then you better well do it!”

Bai Yunlai’s face went pale and his body trembled. His Cultivation base was weak. He was a well-informed person, but quite a few people actually viewed him as being in a very low position. This was not the first time something like this had happened recently. However, he never told Meng Hao, as he didn’t want to distract him. He was always careful in his interactions, but it was impossible to avoid offending everybody.

As for this young man named Liu, he had relied on his relatively high position within the Sect to request medicinal pills of Meng Hao. However, only three orders per day were allowed, and they were first come first serve. Bai Yunlai had done his best not to provoke this Liu youth, but his conciliatory words had only caused him to become hostile.

Even lowly people have their honor. However, Bai Yunlai, trembling, bitter, stared at Liu. He lifted his hand, and seemed just about to slap himself in the face when...

Meng Hao’s calm voice echoed out. “Bai Yunlai!”

Chapter 227: Pill Blacklist!

When Meng Hao's voice rang out, Bai Yunlai looked shocked. He suddenly turned his head and saw Meng Hao slowly strolling out from behind the ornamental rock. He walked slowly, and his face was expressionless.

When Bai Yunlai saw him, his heart leapt with excitement, as well as a little bit of shame. In his mind, he had lost face for Fang Mu. He was about to open his mouth to say something, when Meng Hao's gaze fell upon him, and it was filled with admiration.

That gaze made Bai Yunlai take a deep breath, as if he was proud to have someone recognize all the work he had been doing. It was a good feeling to be following along with Meng Hao as he rose to prominence.

Meng Hao's appearance obviously attracted the attention of the others in the square. They looked over, but of course none of them recognized who he was. The Chosen in the four pagodas frowned. Obviously, Meng Hao was a stranger to them as well.

"Who told you to put your hand down?" said the young man named Liu. "Do you want me to help you slap yourself?" His voice was filled with contempt. He, too, had caught sight of Meng Hao. But this was a valley of the Violet Qi Division. He wouldn't let his grandeur be lessened just because some master alchemist showed up. This was especially true because he knew all of the important master alchemists in the Sect.

Standing directly behind Liu were five others. Their gazes were filled with contempt, and cold smiles broke out onto their faces.

"Bai Yunlai, come here," said Meng Hao, ignoring Liu. He also ignored the other gazes which fell upon him. Meng Hao had encountered many people like this. It didn't matter if they were Chosen or Dao Children, considering Meng Hao's position, they were nothing more than wild dogs that he could afford to simply ignore.

Bai Yunlai quickly turned and took a few steps toward Meng Hao, but then Liu snorted coldly and began to shove his hand out toward him.

“I never said you could leave! Seems you need a beating!” His hand was just about to slam into Bai Yunlai when Meng Hao’s previous expressionless calm changed. A cold light suddenly sprang from his eyes and swept over Liu.

The look was like a clap of thunder, a lightning bolt that split the night sky, or dark clouds of destruction that suddenly appeared in the middle of a sunny day.

It was as if rumbling peals of thunder had filled Liu’s mind. His expression changed. Meng Hao’s gaze was like that of a gargantuan beast that had the power to consume all living things. It caused Liu to unconsciously hold his hand back. By this time, Bai Yunlai had reached Meng Hao.

Meng Hao retracted his gaze, then turned to leave with Bai Yunlai. Considering the level of his Cultivation base, as well as his position within the Sect, these disciples were far beneath him. There was no reason for him to show off in front of these so-called Chosen.

Of course, other than the young man named Liu, none of the other Violet Qi Division Cultivators within the square had been able to sense what just happened, not even the five people who stood behind him. The only thing they saw was Meng Hao’s fierce attitude, and the harsh glint in his eye. However, anyone in the world could give a harsh look to someone; they couldn’t care less about that.

The expression of the Chosen in the four pagodas did change, though. They looked pensive. However, the followers who stood outside the pagodas were obviously much the same as the Cultivators in the middle of the square. They had no clue as to what had just happened.

The five people behind Liu immediately rushed forward to obstruct Meng Hao’s path. Their eyes shined with ill will.

“The Violet Qi Division isn’t somewhere that you can just run your mouth and then leave at will!”

“Halt! Elder Brother Liu was explaining the rules. Bai Yunlai, you can’t leave on two feet! You’ll need a beating!”

“Such gall! Even if you are a master alchemist, do you really think that you can look down on Inner Sect disciples of the Violet Qi Division so wantonly?”

Liu took a deep breath and then strode forward. His voice cold, he said, “You can leave if you want to, but this Bai Yunlai disrespected us. To let him go unpunished would be an insult to the entire Violet Qi Division Inner Sect!” He was scared of Meng Hao; however, while his voice was less arrogant than it had been moments ago, it was still arrogant nonetheless.

Bai Yunlai’s face grew pale and he forced himself to suppress the fury that arose in his eyes. He knew that Meng Hao was a master alchemist, but they were in the territory of the Inner Sect disciples of the Violet Qi Division, so he still had some misgivings. He didn’t mind slapping himself in the face a few times. He didn’t want Meng Hao to get caught up in any troubles because of him. So he stopped in his tracks.

Even as he did, Meng Hao also stopped and turned around. “Who are these people?” he asked coolly.

Bai Yunlai’s voice was low as he replied, “Violet Qi Division Inner Sect disciple Liu Yanbing... he....”

Meng Hao nodded, then calmly said, “From today on, I will not accept any medicinal pill orders from this Liu Yanbing.”

As the words rang out, the Inner Sect disciples all stared in surprise. A few of the more astute among their numbers were already starting to get an idea of what was going on.

The Chosen in the pagodas all stared at Meng Hao with glittering eyes. One of them had already stepped out of the pagoda and walked forward a few paces.

“Not just him,” said Meng Hao unhurriedly. “Those people behind him, too. I won’t accept any orders from them either.” Bai Yunlai’s face filled with shock, but he nodded nonetheless.

Liu Yanbing face tightened as he suddenly looked at Meng Hao. His eyes shined with disbelief. If at this point he didn’t realize who Meng Hao was,

then he didn't deserve to have practiced Cultivation up to the Foundation Establishment stage.

However, there are a lot of stupid people in the world. One of the young men next to Liu Yanbing suddenly laughed.

"Who do you think you are? Seems you think we were begging you to concoct pills or something, so now you're not afraid of your superiors. What makes you think you're so amazing that you can talk like that?"

"Because I'm Fang Mu!" said Meng Hao coolly. This single sentence instantly caused the young man's eyes to bulge and a look of disbelief to cover his face.

"Fang... Fang Mu...."

The faces of others who stood behind Liu Yanbing all twisted. They looked at Meng Hao, stunned. It wasn't just them. All of the Violet Qi Division disciples in the square gasped when they heard these words. Their eyes began to shine brightly as they looked toward Meng Hao.

The faces of the Violet Qi Division Chosen flicked through a variety of expressions. Silence instantly filled the square.

The name of Fang Mu had towered over the Violet Fate Sect throughout the past months. He had an illustrious reputation. Few people didn't know about him and his pill concocting.

Therefore, when Meng Hao spoke the name of Fang Mu, it was like a thunderclap resounding across a plain.

Liu Yanbing's face fell, and the Cultivators behind him suddenly looked worried. Moments ago, they had been happy to teach Bai Yunlai a lesson. After all, he was merely an apprentice alchemist. But now that Alchemist Fang was here in the flesh, they had no desire to offend him. They immediately rushed forward in an attempt to provide explanations.

However, Meng Hao turned. He had no desire to continue speaking with these so-called Inner Sect disciples. Regardless of whether it was because of his status or his position, in all aspects, he and these people were as different as black and white. He turned to leave, Bai Yunlai in tow. Even as

he did, though, the four Chosen hurried to catch up, obviously intent on starting a conversation.

Liu Yanbing's heart was filled with bitterness. However, it is difficult to dismount a tiger after you start riding it. He refused to yield so easily. Gritting his teeth, he forced his mouth open to try to regain some face, "So, you're Fang Mu. Well, maybe you won't concoct pills for me, but do you think you're the only master alchemist in the East Pill Division? Besides, the pills you concoct are low quality, not even worth looking at!"

Meng Hao laughed coldly. He stopped in place for a third time. Turning, he looked intently at Liu Yanbing. If this guy hadn't continued to speak, then he would never deign to argue with him, as uninformed as he was. But his strange, contradictory words caused Meng Hao's gaze to grow icy.

"I'm only one among a thousand master alchemists in the East Pill Division. Maybe my pills aren't worth looking at. So from now on, I won't concoct pills for anyone who has any dealings with you." Meng Hao's cold words caused the Cultivators surrounding Liu Yanbin to edge away. It was hard to tell which one went first. None of them wished to cause any further offense.

Liu Yanbin soon stood there alone. All of the people he had been on friendly terms with had moved far away from him.

Fang Mu was now a very popular master alchemist. It was even difficult to get one pill from him; offending him simply wasn't worth it.

Meng Hao continued calmly, "Also, if I hear of anyone selling you one of my pills, then that person will also be cut off from me." When the onlookers heard this, they all gasped.

These words completely showed how powerful Fang Mu was. Some people might think he was being a bit overbearing, but... he was a master alchemist.

Master alchemists are not to be offended!

"Except, you know what? You offended me..." continued Meng Hao, his voice even colder. Actually, he didn't care if what he was about to do

caused others to be dissatisfied. Their dissatisfaction would not come to fall upon him, because he was a master alchemist, a position which demanded respect. They would only blame Liu Yanbing's inability to open his eyes to reality. "Therefore, for the next one hundred years, not a single master alchemist will concoct pills for you!"

Meng Hao said the words calmly. As he did, he lifted his right hand to reveal a white medallion, upon which he branded Liu Yanbing's name.

This was the ultimate power wielded by master alchemists in the Violet Fate Sect. The Pill Blacklist!

As soon as he branded Liu Yanbing's name onto the medallion, all the master alchemists in the East Pill Division could sense it. They pulled out their Pill Blacklist medallions to look at them. Before, there had been thirteen names on the Blacklist. With Liu Yanbing... there were now fourteen!

The entire square was completely silent. All eyes were on the medallion in Meng Hao's hand. Looks of shock appeared on the four Chosen.

Somebody in the crowd recognized the medallion and said hoarsely, "That's... a Pill Blacklist Medallion!!" The voice was filled with astonishment.

"A Pill Blacklist Medallion. Alchemist Fang Mu actually used the Pill Blacklist Medallion!!"

"Liu Yanbing is finished. It doesn't matter what Clan he's from. He'll never have the seniority to get his name removed from the East Pill Division Blacklist!!"

"Now that he's on the blacklist, not a single master alchemist will concoct pills for Liu Yanbing for the next hundred years. He basically can't practice Cultivation. Alchemist Fang Mu... he really dared to use the medallion...."

Meng Hao stood there as the buzz of conversation filled the air. Next to him Bai Yunlai trembled and stared in amazement. His heart filled with powerful emotions; as of now, he felt as if he would even be willing to die

for Fang Mu.

To be treated the way that Fang Mu treated him, caused him to wish to repay the favor with his life!

Liu Yanbing's expression was filled with despair, and he was panting rapidly. His eyes were bright red and his entire body shook. His face was deathly white. As he thought of the fearsomeness of the Pill Blacklist, and the consequences of having his name on it, his eyes filled with hopelessness. The Pill Blacklist Medallion could only be used by a master alchemist twice, and was only to be used out of absolute necessity.

How could he have ever imagined that Fang Mu would actually... would really... would truly use the Pill Blacklist Medallion on him? His body grew cold and his eyes blank. It was like his head had been struck repeatedly by lightning.

His heart trembled. He knew what it meant to be placed on the Pill Blacklist. Regardless of his Clan, there was no way anyone would be able to help him. He suddenly regretted everything. If time could flow backward, he would never have offended Meng Hao. Body trembling, the only thing he could say was, "Alchemist Fang... I...."

Chapter 228: Falling Leaves are Beautiful; They Only Live One Season

Suddenly, laughter rang out. The four Chosen had already pushed their way through the crowd. Ignoring Liu Yanbing, they walked straight for Meng Hao, clasping hands respectfully as they approached him. Their expressions were serious and polite, but they spoke with smiles and laughter.

“Alchemist Fang, sir, I’ve always wanted to meet you! Now that we’ve run into each other, allow me to humbly act as host. Let’s drink some alcohol and gaze at the moon together. Wouldn’t it be wonderful?”

“Hahaha. Elder Brother Xu beat me to the punch. Alchemist Fang, your skill in the Dao of alchemy is the talk of the Sect. Since we happen to meet today, would it be an imposition to allow Junior Brother here to join you? We can all treat you!”

“Alchemist Fang, that pill order I placed recently isn’t urgent. Just get to it whenever it’s convenient. Please don’t leave yet! As Junior Brother Bai Yunlai knows, we sincerely wish to pay you our respects.”

As for Liu Yanbing and his friends, they were completely ignored. It didn’t matter if Liu Yanbing was related to a Patriarch of the Sect. How could his position possibly compare to that of a master alchemist? Fang Mu was a master alchemist with obviously unlimited potential, and one who didn’t shirk from using the Pill Blacklist... it was clear who was superior here.

Among the thousand master alchemists, some wouldn’t use the Pill Blacklist medallion even once in their entire life. Some would use it only if absolutely necessary. Generally, they would be hesitant, though. Most people are not decisive enough to do so. But Fang Mu used it without hesitation. The threatening aura this created permeated into the hearts of everyone present.

The four Chosen crowded around Meng Hao, as did the rest of the Inner

Sect disciples who were with them. Smiles covered their faces. Even though it appeared as if Fang Mu's Cultivation base were not even in the Foundation Establishment stage yet, they still treated him with utmost courtesy.

Meng Hao smiled slightly, clasped hands and bowed back to them. After a moment, he tried to make some excuses and get away, but couldn't. Eventually, he decided it would be ungracious not to accept their kindness. Nodding, he followed them off into the distance, trailed by Bai Yunlai. The sound of their happy laughter and harmonious chatting echoed out.

Back in the square, Liu Yanbing stood there, his face pale white. His mind spun, and his eyes were blank and filled with despair. The other Cultivators in the square stared with various expressions. However, it was at this moment that off in the distance, Meng Hao suddenly turned to them and clasped hands in a bow. "Fellow Daoists and Sect members. Why don't you join us?"

Hearing this, the eyes of the four Chosen glittered brightly. Giving meaningful looks to Meng Hao they also turned and beckoned for the others to join them.

Seeing this, the faces of the other Inner Sect disciples in the square lifted. They hurried over, clasping hands and bowing. Soon the whole group of dozens or more Cultivators all walked off into the distance.

Meng Hao was at the center of it all, a blazing moon surrounded by glittering stars. The laughter and talking drifted out with the wind.

Now only Liu Yanbing and his friends remained in the large square. Their faces were unsightly, especially the faces of those who stared at Liu Yanbing. Their eyes were filled with fury.

In the following days, Meng Hao didn't spend all day every day concocting pills. He often went to the mountains and valleys of the Violet Qi Division. Slowly, more and more people began to recognize his face. Gradually, his reputation in the Violet Qi Division grew even better.

At the same time, he also spent time with the other master alchemists. He would call on them to visit, exchange pointers about the Dao of

alchemy, and share recent experiences. He made sure that each visit was one of mutual gain; it was in this way that he gradually began to build up his social network.

As for Liu Yanbing, it was with great bitterness that he came to realize how truly horrifying the Pill Blacklist was. The master alchemists who used to concoct pills for him would now completely ignore him. It didn't matter how much money he offered, none of them would concoct a single pill.

Furthermore, all the people whom he had used to be close to, gradually began to drift further and further away.

In fact, on one occasion when he went to visit his Clan Patriarch, he was severely berated and then sent on his way. In the Violet Fate Sect, master alchemists are not to be offended. Once the Pill Blacklist Medallion is used, the word would spread throughout the whole Sect. Even Patriarchs know that the most fearsome thing in the East Pill Division was not the Dao of alchemy, but the protection they had set up for themselves.

That protection was evident from the results of the Pill Blacklist.

Within the East Pill Division, there can be power struggles, and competition. But if outsiders dared to dishonor it, then the alchemists would stand together united in their fury, and desire for revenge. This is because master alchemists are NOT to be dishonored or offended. That was an ironclad rule of the East Pill Division.

That was how the Pill Blacklist Medallion arrangement began in the first place.

In the outside world, it might not be a big deal to offend a master alchemist who was not from the East Pill Division. Other master alchemists wouldn't get involved. However in the East Pill Division, if you offended one, then you offended all.

In some ways, it might not seem very reasonable. But that unreasonable arrangement ensured that the master alchemists were treated with respect wherever they went, inside the Sect or outside.

Offend one, offend all. Few could afford to do such a thing.

Of course, if someone offended another master alchemist, Meng Hao would not go against the tide. As a master alchemist, the most important thing to him was to defend the position of all master alchemists.

And so, time passed. Meng Hao continued to concoct medicinal pills. Three batches per day. The new arrangement made the other master alchemists much less resentful.

After all, there were tens of thousands of disciples in the Inner Sect of the Violet Qi Division. Seeking out master alchemists involved certain rules, but as long as the alchemists didn't get too greedy, there wouldn't be too much resentment.

When you added in the fact that Meng Hao went out of his way to go visit the other master alchemists, it was like a cool wind blowing through their hair. Their sulkiness dissipated, and gradually, they all came to accept him.

As for Meng Hao, in addition to his three batches of pills per day, he spent a lot of time creating medicinal pills to hand over to the Sect. In addition, he used Foundation Establishment Day to slowly increase his Cultivation base.

Several months later, on one late night, Meng Hao sat cross-legged in his Immortal's Cave. In front of him were three bottles of Foundation Establishment Day. After looking at them closely for a while, his eyes began to shine brightly.

"Today I will create my sixth Dao Pillar!" He took a deep breath. As of now, his sixth Dao Pillar was more than ninety percent complete. Because of the engulfing power he knew would appear, he had waited some time before attempting to complete the final ten percent. The preparations had taken some time, but now that he was certain it was safe, he was ready to start.

His eyes shined with determination. He picked up a Foundation Establishment Day, swallowed it, and closed his eyes. The sixth Dao Pillar began to congeal inside of him. A golden glow began to spread out from

his body, within which were streams of magical symbols. All of a sudden, a garrulous chatter drifted out.

“Three bullies, three bullies. Three less won’t do!” The noise, of course, came from the meat jelly, who had just woken up. It spoke the words and then spit out a mouthful of Qi.

The Qi spread out to cover the golden glow that surrounded Meng Hao. It made the Qi coming off of his Perfect Dao Pillars look ordinary. This way, the Violet Fate Sect wouldn’t detect anything unusual.

Time passed slowly. By dawn, Meng Hao’s body was trembling. His skin was withered, and an intensely violent sucking force suddenly appeared. It seemed as if it had been thirsty for thousands of years and wanted to swallow up Meng Hao’s body and soul to sate its thirst.

Meng Hao was prepared for this, though. As soon as the suction force appeared, he immediately crushed the several pill bottles that remained in front of him. These were what he had worked so hard to produce: Foundation Establishment Day pills of ninety percent medicinal strength. He popped them into his mouth.

As soon as they entered his mouth, they exploded, transforming into boundless spiritual power that immediately began to be sucked into the sixth Dao Pillar.

At noontime, Meng Hao’s eyes snapped open, and they shined with a bright, glittering light. As he sat there cross-legged, he didn’t seem much different than before, except that he looked a little weaker. Inside, however, was a raging storm. The shocking ripples which emanated from his Cultivation base were consumed one by one by the meat jelly.

His sixth perfect Dao Pillar had appeared. Meng Hao took a deep breath and slowly closed his eyes. After a moment, he opened them again. They no longer glowed, but were calm, and filled with a strange light. The light was confidence born of his Cultivation base.

Six Perfect Dao Pillars. Mid Foundation Establishment. With one more Dao Pillar, he would be in late Foundation Establishment! At that point, a Dao Child with a Flawless Foundation wouldn’t qualify to even attack him.

Their Dao Pillars would be reduced to trembling by the crushing pressure he could emit.

Even now, with his six Dao Pillars, he could easily exterminate any Dao Child.

As for the so-called Chosen, they were like ants or dried weeds that could be crushed on a whim.

“Perfect Foundation. Such incredible potency....” Meng Hao’s voice was soft, but his eyes shone with anticipation. This anticipation was for his ninth Dao Pillar, when he completed the great circle of Foundation Establishment.

There was a flickering in front of Meng Hao and the meat jelly appeared. It danced back and forth, its eyes wide. “Three bullies!” it cried.

After shedding, the meat jelly hadn’t transformed back into a parrot, but had maintained its meat jelly form.

“Three bullies! No less than three bullies!” it repeated in a voice that could chop nails and slice iron.

It appeared content. With a burp and some muttering, it disappeared into the bag of the Cosmos to find the Li Clan Patriarch and discuss noontime naps.

Meng Hao stood and opened the door of his Immortal’s Cave. Dazzling morning sunlight filtered down. He took a deep breath. Winter was ending and Spring was beginning. There was no snow, like in the State of Zhao. Winter in the Violet Fate Sect had no snow.

He looked quietly up into the sky and suddenly realized that he had been in the Violet Fate Sect for more than three years now. In fact, now that he calculated it carefully, it would soon be four years.

“Time flies so quickly...” he said quietly. Practicing Cultivation on his own, he could truly sense the passage of time. His senses were no longer those of a mortal’s.

As he reminisced, he thought of Chen Fan, Elder Sister Xu and Fatty.

Various scenes played out in his head. He knew where they were, but they... they had no idea where he was.

By this time, the name of Meng Hao was already a thing of the past. Few people brought it up any more. Soon, everyone would forget it. All the waves from the events four years ago had died down and disappeared.

“Life is like a dream, like a leaf that, no matter how beautiful, can only live for one season....” He looked at the buds sprouting from the great trees off in the distance and a smile broke out on his face. He liked his identity here as Fang Mu. He enjoyed how being in the East Pill Division felt like being in an institute of higher learning. He lifted his hand, and a jade slip appeared on his palm.

This jade slip had been branded by the Li Clan Patriarch at the behest of the meat jelly. It was branded with a Li Clan Conclave technique.

Self Will Incantation.

Chapter 229: Because this Will, Can Only Belong to Devils!

Self Will Incantation.

A Li Clan Conclave technique. In this technique, one's will was the key in which magic can be Cultivated. Furthermore, if cultivated to a consummate level, then during Spirit Severing or Dao enlightenment, Karma could be seized.

The technique actually seemed more like a scripture. Except it wasn't a scripture scroll, but seemingly a fragment of a scroll. Nonetheless, this short passage was enough to become a Conclave technique of the Li Clan.

Meng Hao examined it thoughtfully for a while. Then, his expression flickered and he waved his hand. The jade slip disappeared.

Not much time passed before Bai Yunlai appeared, walking up hastily. He formally greeted Meng Hao in a respectful tone. Ever since the matter with Liu Yanbing, Bai Yunlai carried himself differently in front of Meng Hao. They were still close, but it was now clear that their positions were different. There was a slight tension between them.

Meng Hao tried a few times to get him to act more like he had when Meng Hao first joined the Sect. However, it just made him nervous. So, he allowed Bai Yunlai to greet him formally every time they met, and to speak in a reverent tone.

Meng Hao could only sigh at this change. He understood that it would be impossible to maintain the same relationship they always had. His own Dao of alchemy was growing further and further away from Bai Yunlai's, and as such, the respect the man showed grew deeper and deeper.

"Grandmaster Fang, these are the orders I've accepted recently. Please, take a look." He handed over a bag of holding.

Meng Hao glanced it over and then tried to chat a bit with Bai Yunlai. Bai Yunlai's respectful expression didn't change, which caused Meng Hao to sigh again inwardly. With a slight nod of his head, he tucked the bag of

holding away.

Bai Yunlai hesitated for a moment, then looked at Meng Hao and lowered his voice. "Grandmaster Fang, there's only one more month until this year's Pill Auction. Sir, I'm not sure if you plan to participate in the auction or not...?"

"Pill Auction...." Meng Hao thought back to four years ago when he had first joined the Violet Fate Sect. There had been a Pill Auction underway at that time. Now, he had quite a reputation in the East Pill Division. The Pill Auction was a place for master alchemists to manifest their reputation.

Also, it was a place where medicinal pills were directly sold for Spirit Stones in an official capacity. The Pill Auction only happened once per year, and Meng Hao had never attended one before. Suddenly, his heart began to thump. He was a master alchemist who was quite popular within the Sect. But he wanted to know how much a price his pills would fetch in the Southern Domain in general.

Master alchemists could offer their wares with their name attached to it, or anonymously. In the case of the latter, no one, not even members of the Sect, would know whose pill it was that was up for sale.

However, there is no wall in the world which can hold back any wind. It might be difficult for the Elders to figure out which pill was made by whom, but if Grandmaster Pill Demon wanted to know, then he could naturally be able to figure out.

Meng Hao muttered to himself for a moment, and then nodded. Not only did he want to see how much his pills were worth in the outside world, he also wanted to replenish his supply of Spirit Stones. Copying the Foundation Establishment Day had cost him quite a bit. Even as a master alchemist who was frequently compensated by Inner Sect disciples for pill concocting, he still couldn't afford such expenditures.

As of now, he had quite a collection of medicinal plants, but not a lot of Spirit Stones. This, of course, caused Meng Hao to sigh. When he was young, he had always dreamed of being rich. That dream seemed to be just as far away as ever.

He saw off Bai Yunlai and was standing there in thought, when suddenly a bright beam of light appeared off in the distance. The image of a slim, graceful woman was visible inside. It was none other than Chu Yuyan.

The instant he saw her, Meng Hao sighed at his bad luck, then immediately turned and entered his Immortal's Cave.

"Fang Mu!!"

The instant her voice echoed out, the door of the Immortal's Cave shut and sealed. Then, Meng Hao's voice could be heard:

"Fang Mu isn't home."

Chu Yuyan's eyes blazed with killing intent. Her veins bulged as she stood outside the Immortal's cave, gnashing her teeth. She had come to call on Meng Hao on multiple occasions during the past year, but he always seemed to be away, and never inside the cave. For him to act like this, as if he had just caught sight of some kind of devilish fiend, caused fury to burn within her.

Teeth clenched, she said, "Fang Mu, are you hiding from me because you have some secret you don't want people to know about!?" Every time she came here and found the door shut, she would say something like this.

She was more and more certain that Fang Mu was harboring some secret. For him to act like this every time she came really set her on fire. Whenever anyone said his name, the irritated feeling would fill her and she would feel like doing something to him.

Meng Hao's voice drifted out of the Immortal's cave: "What you can't see, can't annoy you."

Chu Yuyan's stared with wide eyes. She banged her fist onto the door. A boom echoed out. The door rattled a bit, but wasn't damaged in any way.

"Get out here!"

"I'm concocting pills."

"Are you coming out or not?"

"Aiii. Elder Sister Chu, I'm concocting pills, really!"

“Who the hell said I’m your Elder Sister? I’m a Furnace Lord. You’re just a master alchemist. If you don’t come out here right now, we’ll see how long you can stay there in your Immortal’s Cave.”

“Fine, Fellow Daoist Chu. You know, last time you camped out next to my Immortal’s Cave for seven days. Later, a lot of slanderous rumors spread throughout the Sect. It’s really not a good thing. Don’t you agree?”

“You....”

“I, Fang Mu, am not married to any beloved, and am very concerned with my reputation. Such rumors are really intolerable. Fellow Daoist Chu, please refrain from harming my reputation in this way. Take your leave, quickly.” Meng Hao sighed. Actually, Chu Yuyan’s intuition frightened him. He had been avoiding her for years now, because he had the strong feeling that if he had any interaction with her, she might begin to pick up some clues.

If she somehow realized that he was Meng Hao... well, he didn’t dare to think of how horrific the consequences might be.

Chu Yuyan gnashed her teeth and stamped her foot angrily. Then she turned and left.

Sensing that she’d gone, Meng Hao sighed in relief. A wry smile appeared on his face. Everything about the East Pill Division was good except for Chu Yuyan. With her here, he didn’t feel secure.

“If she keeps causing problems for me, I might have to think of some other method to deal with her....” His eyes shined with a cold light, but his face’s usual calm expression returned. He stopped thinking about Chu Yuyan. With the wave of a hand, the earthly fire within his Immortal’s Cave sprang to life. A pill furnace appeared to hover directly over the fire.

This particular furnace of Meng Hao’s had three cranes carved onto its surface. As the furnace began to glow red from the heat, the three cranes turned the color of blood. They looked like they might fly out from the surface of the furnace at any moment. It was a cowing sight.

Meng Hao had traded a large collection of medicinal pills and plants

with a veteran master alchemist to acquire this Blood Crane furnace. Having used it for some time, he was very familiar with it.

The furnace quickly became bright red, but Meng Hao stood off to the side, paying it no attention. A thoughtful look appeared in his eyes.

“What type of pill should I concoct for the Pill Auction...” he thought. Hundreds of pill formulas flashed through his mind, but none of them caught his attention. Enough time passed for an incense stick to burn. The pill furnace was as red as blood, and its glow filled the entire Immortal’s cave, causing everything to look red. Meng Hao’s eyes suddenly flashed.

“I’ll concoct a poison pill!” Based on Meng Hao’s understanding of the Dao of alchemy, poison pills generally did not have recipes that were handed down. They were usually created spontaneously or from memory by the master alchemist. This prevented unauthorized pill formulas from being passed around.

Poison pills were somewhat of a taboo. However, most master alchemists would research and concoct them at some point. It was a way to prove not only a master alchemist’s skill in the Dao of alchemy, but rather, his understanding of plants and vegetation. One must have a thorough mastery of the variations of plants and vegetation to be able to concoct a poison pill uniquely classified as belonging to a given master alchemist.

A pill created by one person that ten thousand people couldn’t dispel. All master alchemists thirsted to create something like this.

Meng Hao took a deep breath, then sat down cross legged next to the pill furnace. He allowed the heat from it to fill his body, and then closed his eyes. He sat silently in meditation. Days passed. The fire continued to burn. The Blood Crane furnace showed no signs of degrading; it maintained its bright red appearance the entire time.

Seven days later, Meng Hao’s eyes suddenly opened. His eyes were filled with determination.

“This poison pill will not be a pill to give to enemies, but to oneself. Poison, but not poison. Medicine, but not medicine. This pill....” He

thought back to the time in the State of Zhao when he had killed Shangguan Xiu, and of the pearl Little Tiger had given him. The pearl caused one's Cultivation base to rise by one level. Thanks to the help of the pearl, Meng Hao had been able to open the ancient path which led to the tenth level of Qi Condensation. ¹

The images from that day sprung clearly into his mind. The pearl had fearsome power, and had left a deep impression on Meng Hao.

"Pierce the Qi vessels throughout the body, chop them like mincemeat. Turn the body into a treasure, split open the chest. Crush the mind, consolidate millions upon millions of murderous intentions. Explode the Dao Pillars within the Core Sea; killing intent can exterminate spirits. Use the mortal soul to fuse with spirits. Use the power of killing to subvert consciousness. The mind and the Core Sea, fused into nothing in the blink of an eye. This Devilish Will shall transform into a suicidal heart, which will cause the Cultivation base to climb to the skies!

"It is not a burning of the soul, it supersedes that! This pill... will be called Bedevilment Pill! That is because, this Will, can only belong to devils!" Meng Hao's bloodshot eyes glittered. His right hand grabbed his bag of holding and then waved it in front of him. Immediately ten thousand varieties of medicinal plants appeared to float in mid-air in front of him. Bathed in the crimson glow, the scene seemed bizarrely demonic.

Meng Hao's hands blurred, and a flickering shadow appeared beneath them. Meng Hao's entire mind, all his energy, poured into the pill furnace. He catalyzed and pulverized medicinal plants. He created hybrids to look for one particular root he needed.

From the time Meng Hao had begun to study the Dao of alchemy, during all the various situations in which he had concocted pills, he had never been so possessed. It was his first time to make full and thorough use all of his skill in the Dao of alchemy, all of his nature talent of plants and vegetation.

His hair was wild and disheveled, and he lost awareness of everything. He was immersed in pill concoction. All his desire poured into the

Bedevilment Pill. It was like he himself was possessed by a devil!

This Bedevilment Pill was actually... the first true pill ever created by Meng Hao in his time Cultivating the Dao of Alchemy!

There was no formula for this pill. It didn't need one. This was a pill that contained the true will of a master alchemist, a pill that had been created by the influence of will. Therefore, its true value and price was impossible to describe. Even more important was the fact that, if a Furnace Lord could see Meng Hao in his current state, that person would surely go mad.

In Cultivation, there is enlightenment. The Dao of alchemy also has enlightenment. Pill Demon had experienced such enlightenment. So had the other two Grandmasters in the Southern Domain. Some Violet Furnace Lords might experience it once in their life, although that depended only on luck and fortune. Just now, Meng Hao had experienced alchemic enlightenment!

The pill created as a result of alchemic enlightenment was as miraculous as if it had been created by the Heavens themselves. It was unparalleled and unmatched!

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1. The events with the pearl occurred in chapter 75.

Chapter 230: Bury Devils Beneath the Earth

This pill concoction lasted an entire month. From the time Meng Hao had learned to concoct pills until now, this was by far the longest time he had ever spent doing so. For one month, he didn't rest. All of his energy was focused on the concoction of this pill.

Over ten thousand varieties of medicinal plant variations, all shaped by the will of Meng Hao's mind. Based on endless adjustments and variations, it slowly transformed into a unique pill that was solely of Meng Hao.

On the last day of the month of concocting, late in the moon-filled night, the Blood Crane pill furnace trembled. It was no longer bright red; it was gradually returning to its original color. This process took several hours. When the moonlight was beginning to grow hazy and dim outside, the furnace finally returned to its original state. Meng Hao's hair was in a mess, and his eyes filled with veins of blood. His face was pale white. His Cultivation base had been rotating and emitting power for an entire month straight.

Thankfully, he had six Dao Pillars now. If he only had five, like a few days ago, then even replenishing himself with medicinal pills, he would have been forced to suspend pill concoction midway.

If alchemic enlightenment ceases before completion, then it cannot be resumed.

Seeing the completely recovered pill furnace in front of him, Meng Hao took a deep breath. He was exhausted from the month of work. During the most critical part of the concocting, he had experienced what felt like a bitter struggle between life and death. He closed his eyes, and as he did, they burned painfully.

A long time passed before he opened them again. Without hesitation, he lifted his right hand up to press onto the pill furnace. It trembled, and two

black colored pills flew out. The instant they did, a black cloud suddenly began to form above the pill furnace.

The black cloud wasn't outside of the Immortal's Cave. No, it was inside; the bizarre sight caused Meng Hao to stare blankly, his eyes filled with confusion. It took only a moment for the cloud to finish forming. Suddenly, lightning shot out from it, directly at the medicinal pills.

At this critical moment, Meng Hao slapped his bag of holding and the meat jelly flew out. As soon as it saw the black cloud, it stared in shock. Then its eyes glowed, and it flew to meet the descending lightning bolt. It opened its mouth and consumed the entire lightning bolt. It smacked its lips as if it had just eaten something delicious.

"Pill Tribulation Lightning," said the meat jelly, licking its lips. "So, it turns out that's the tastiest...." Suddenly, its eyes fell upon the two pills Meng Hao held in his hands. It seemed eager to try them.

"Three bullies!" said Meng Hao resolutely. The meat jelly hesitated for a moment, as if it were torn about something. Finally, it returned to the blood-colored mask, muttering to itself, apparently preparing to vent its frustrations on the Li Clan Patriarch.

Having dismissed the meat jelly, Meng Hao took a deep breath and looked down at his palm. The two black pills seemed to be struggling, as if they wanted to fly away. This was the first time he had concocted what were apparently sentient pills, ones that had provoked Tribulation lightning.

Meng Hao's eyes shone. He may be tired, but couldn't stop from staring at the two pills.

They were essentially the same size. However, one was pitch black, whereas the other had a violet hue. It only took a moment for Meng Hao to come to the conclusion that the violet-colored pill was the superior of the two. The other could also be considered a consummate product, just slightly inferior.

Despite the struggles of the pills, they were incapable of leaving Meng Hao's hand. The two black pills did not emit a medicinal fragrance, and

seemed to suck in all the light that touched them. If you looked at them for too long, it seemed as if your soul would be sucked inside.

“I concocted these pills with true will...” murmured Meng Hao. Eventually, his eyes flickered. He waved his left hand and a flying sword appeared. Very slowly, he carved a mark onto the side of each pill. It was a simple mark which depicted... a cauldron!

It was the same cauldron he had seen in the Blessed Land of the Black Sieve Sect, the cauldron which had desired to defeat the Heavens.

It wasn't a completely accurate depiction, but very close. Strangely, after inscribing the pills with the mark, they stopped struggling. The cauldron mark flickered, as if it had branded itself onto the hearts of the pills. Now, the cauldron mark suddenly seemed as if it were alive, real.

Meng Hao took a deep breath, and then a smile broke out on his face. At the same time, a wave of exhaustion swept through him. He hadn't rested for an entire month. He was a Foundation Establishment Cultivator, but this was too much even for him; he simply didn't have enough energy.

“This is a pill of bedevilment, the very peak of bedevilment. The brand of the cauldron represents the Earth, and has suppressed it. Bury devils beneath the Earth, in accordance with the name of the pill.” Meng Hao retrieved a pill bottle and put the first Bedevilment Pill inside. He sealed it with wax, and then placed the violet-colored Bedevilment Pill into another pill bottle.

After this, he pulled out a jade slip which he used to summon Bai Yunlai. Soon, Bai Yunlai appeared outside the Immortal's Cave. He didn't have to wait long before a pill bottle flew out to land on his hand.

Meng Hao's tired voice echoed out from the Immortal's Cave. “Put this up anonymously in the Pill Auction. It's called Bedevilment Pill. Come for me when the auction is about to begin.” He sat cross-legged, his eyes closed, seemingly half asleep, immersed in restoring his energy.

Bai Yunlai clasped hands in salute, then left with the pill bottle.

Three days flashed by. During that time, the entire State of Eastern

Emergence bustled with activities as one Sect after another arrived in Violet Moon City¹. There weren't just Sects from the State of Eastern Emergence, but from other places as well.

In fact, all of the other four great Sects, as well as the three great Clans, all dispatched disciples to the Violet Fate Sect to participate in the yearly Pill Auction. Actually, for an event to take place yearly made it a somewhat frequent event; nonetheless, it still attracted the attention of Cultivators throughout the entire Southern Domain. That was because all of the items in the auction were concocted by master alchemists of the East Pill Division.

Furthermore, Furnace Lords would usually participate as well, and would provide a unique variety of medicinal pills. The medicinal strength of their pills would be considerable, enough to cause a sensation in the Southern Domain. Occasionally, stunning, one-of-a-kind creations would appear.

Every year, different master alchemists' names would rise and then spread throughout the outside world. You could say that the Pill Auction was a platform for master alchemists to gain fame. Of course, the East Pill Division encouraged this, and urged the master alchemists to concoct pills to sell at the auction.

Not only were the master alchemists encouraged to provide medicinal pills so that their fame would grow within the Southern Domain, but also, for material gain. After all, the profits from the sale of the medicinal pills all went back to the master alchemists.

This was a set rule, which caused virtually all of the master alchemists to participate.

Furthermore, the Violet Fate Sect strictly controlled its medicinal pills. The only way for outsiders to acquire them was by participating in the Pill Auction. There would always be a few types of pills that would give rise to frenzied bidding. Usually, this was not because of the medicinal strength of the pill alone, but also the concoction method used.

After all, despite not acquiring the pill formula, research of the pill would reveal much about the methods which had been used to concoct it.

The master alchemists of the Violet Fate Sect had no way to prevent this from happening. Anyone with sufficient skill could perform such research on medicinal pills.

In short, it is easy to imagine the stir caused by the yearly Pill Auction.

The location of the Pill Auction was, of course, Violet Moon City. In the southeast corner of the city, was an enormous circular edifice, a stadium which could seat a hundred thousand Cultivators.

Generally speaking, during every Pill Auction, because of the influx of Cultivators from all regions, the seats would be completely filled.

The Pill Auction usually lasted for seven days, and could be rated as a grand occasion hosted by the Violet Fate Sect.

This particular day was the first day of the auction. The auction stadium was already full. The eyes of the Cultivators from all the various Sects and Clans were focused on the stage in the middle of the stadium.

Standing there was a middle-aged man who smiled and clasped hands respectfully to the audience.

“Fellow Daoists of the Southern Domain, Ladies and Gentlemen, you all know the rules of the Violet Fate Sect’s Pill Auction, so I won’t go into all the details. We have a total of 789 types of medicinal pills up for auction, including pills appropriate for Qi Condensation, Foundation Establishment, Core Formation, and even Nascent Soul stage Cultivators! Furthermore, there will be poison pills and magic pills available as well.

“According to the rules of the Violet Fate Sect Pill Auction, before auctioning each pill, a small shaving will be taken to test the medical strength of the pill, as well as to clearly demonstrate its effectiveness.” Having said that, the man waved his hand, causing a gigantic curved portal to open up behind him.

Bright ripples spread out, after which everyone could see a group of seven hundred Cultivators standing on the other side, their faces expressionless.

These Cultivators had Cultivation bases of various levels, and their ages

were different. There was one similarity between all of them, however. All of their eyes glowed with a violet light. Outsiders might not know what this meant, but Meng Hao would. It would only take one glance for him to determine that these people... had all cultivated the Violet Qi to the West technique! These were puppet disciples of the Sect! ²

“These Cultivators of the East Pill Division have been selected to sample all the pills which will be auctioned today. Ladies and Gentlemen, most likely this is not your first time to attend our Pill Auction, so you must surely already know, the Violet Fate Sect’s Pill Auction is unmatched in the entire Southern Domain!” The man’s voice echoed throughout the stadium, which subsequently filled with respectful laughter.

“Let the auction begin!” the man cried. “Lot one is a bottle of Yang Toppling Pills concocted by Furnace Lord Liu Yong of the East Pill Division! Transform life force into Death Qi, cause enormous transformation! Use this pill in your Immortal’s cave to collect Yin powers. Consume it to cause an abrupt rise of Death Qi. This pill is suitable for any Fellow Daoist who cultivates Spirit Puppet arts.” Even as the man’s voice rang out, Bai Yunlai and Meng Hao were hurrying toward the stadium.

Being a master alchemist, Meng Hao caught the attention of many apprentice alchemists as he entered. He sat down in the pavilion reserved for master alchemists, and then looked down at the auction proceeding below.

He took a deep breath of anticipation. He keenly anticipated finding out if people would be interested in his Bedevilment Pill, and how high of a price it would fetch. After all, since becoming a master alchemist, he had never been more pleased with a pill. Although he had complete confidence in it, he was a bit worried about whether or not it would be profitable.

He glanced over the crowd, a thoughtful expression on his face. Suddenly, a look of shock appeared, which then transformed into a slight smile. His gaze had fallen onto a group of visitors, amidst whom was a

certain fat young man, casually grinding his teeth.

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1. Violet Moon City was first mentioned in Chapter 209, when Meng Hao first arrived in Violet Fate Sect territory.
2. Violet Qi to the West was described in Chapter 114.

Chapter 231: Pill Auction

In all of the Southern Domain, there was only one person who could appear so domineering, who would use a flying sword to grind his teeth!

Li Fugui...

... Also known as Fatty. Other than him, there was no Cultivator in the Southern Domain who dared to grind his teeth in such a fashion. Clustered around Fatty were a group of Golden Frost Sect disciples with vigilant and protective looks on their faces. Their presence actually served only to draw more attention to him.

Fatty was... even fatter.

The other Cultivators who sat nearby eyed him with strange looks, and engaged in furtive conversations. How could Fatty pay attention to such things though? He complacently pulled out a Spirit Stone, popped it into his mouth and crunched it into bits.

This caused the eyes of the surrounding onlookers to fill with shock, and their hearts with envy.

Meng Hao hadn't seen him in four years. However, he would think of him often, as well as Elder Sister Xu and Chen Fan. Seeing him here, Meng Hao couldn't help but smile and sigh emotionally.

Being Fang Mu for the past four years, taking root in the Violet Fate Sect and rising to prominence, had given him the means to send out some inquiries about his friends. He knew that all of them had made progress in their various Sects. For example, Elder Sister Xu had long since reached Foundation Establishment. She had taken Han Bei as her Master, and was in a much better position in the Black Sieve Sect than she had been all those years before.

As for Chen Fan, after four years' time, he was now a Chosen in the Solitary Sword Sect.

Fatty, of course, was the least given to studying and learning techniques. However, he was still in the same position as he had been within the

Golden Frost Sect. If he wanted wind, there was wind, and thanks to his value to the Sect, he also had reached Foundation Establishment.

The name of Meng Hao was now nearly forgotten in the Southern Domain.

Meng Hao smiled happily. To be able to see his old friend really lifted his mood.

Seeing Meng Hao looking at Fatty, Bai Yunlai leaned over and, in a low voice, said, "That's Li Fugui from the Golden Frost Sect. I remember hearing that last year, he married his third beloved.... According to the rumors, the Golden Frost Sect will go to any lengths to find appropriate female Cultivators to become his beloved, all with hopes of continuing his bloodline...."

Hearing this, Meng Hao gaped for a moment, then laughed and shook his head wordlessly.

Sighing, he thought, "I never thought that from the group of us from the Reliance Sect in the State of Zhao, Fatty would end up in the most comfortable position." Even he couldn't help but feel a bit of envy at Fatty's special position on the path of Cultivation.

He suddenly thought back to when they had first joined the Reliance Sect. Fatty had constantly wept and wailed about wanting to go home and get married. Meng Hao couldn't help but smile at the memory. A gentle light filled his eyes.

The auction was continuously underway, of course. Each pill that came up for auction would have a bit of powder shaved off and given to one of the Cultivators who had practiced Violet Qi to the West. After consuming the powder, the Cultivator's body would become translucent, so that all the onlookers could see the effect of the medicine.

This was a tradition of the Violet Fate Sect Pill Auction that had existed for countless years, a method to guarantee the quality of the products.

Time passed, and soon it was noon.

"This lot is for a Barrier Breaking Pill. Fellow Daoists, Ladies and

Gentlemen, I'm sure you're all very well aware of the properties of this pill....” As he spoke, a Violet Qi to the West disciple consumed some of the powder, giving everyone a clear view of the results.

“20,000 Spirit Stones!” cried Fatty, his voice filled with a domineering tone that well matched his stocky frame.

“30,000 Spirit Stones!”

“Your granny!” shouted Fatty gruffly. He stood up. “Fine, you punk, 50,000 Spirit Stones!”

“60,000 Spirit Stones!”

“70,000 Spirit Stones....” someone else said.

Actually, the value of a Barrier Breaking Pill was dependent on individual circumstances. With a hundred thousand Cultivators present, the number who were currently stuck in a bottleneck, or who soon would be, was hard to determine. A high price was always required to break through a bottleneck.

“100,000 Spirit Stones,” roared Fatty. “I have Spirit Stones to spare, punks! They're not even mine! Do you really dare to compete with me!” He pulled out a Spirit Stone which he then placed between his teeth and crushed. The surrounding Golden Frost Sect disciples could only make wry smiles.

Fatty's words seemed to have the desired effect. Besides, Barrier Breaking Pills were good, but not necessarily guaranteed to be completely effective. 100,000 Spirit Stones was an incredible price that apparently no one was willing to exceed.

A strange look had appeared on Meng Hao's face. The Barrier Breaking Pill hadn't been concocted by him. From this distance, he could clearly see the pill's effect on the translucent body of the Violet Qi to the West disciple, as well as its medicinal strength. Based on his skill in the Dao of alchemy, it was obvious that whoever had concocted the pill had only been able to extract thirty percent medicinal strength from the plants and vegetation which had been used as ingredients.

“It seems the price I charged Ding Yong for the same pill... was a little low....” he thought. Of course, it wasn’t really possible to compare the prices within the Sect with those without. This was especially true when one was sold to a fellow Sect member, whereas the other was sold at auction.

The auction continued on. As more pills appeared, the atmosphere in the auction stadium climbed. This was especially true when a pill concocted by a Furnace Lord appeared. The price for that particular pill had already reached hundreds of thousands of Spirit Stones. This caused Meng Hao to pant. It was the first time he had seen how much profits master alchemists could make. It was really shocking.

It was especially astounding because Meng Hao knew the base cost of the pill, which was just a few tens of thousands of Spirit Stones. Furthermore, the so-called medicinal strength was only at fifty percent. Meng Hao could produce a similar pill without barely even concentrating.

Fatty made bids on just about all of the pills, and acquired quite a few. He was becoming one of the most recognized figures in the auction stadium. This was especially true considering how he continuously made furtive glances at nearby female Cultivators. When he caught the eye of one, he would put on the most casual, cool look he could.

The others from the Golden Frost Sect could only sigh. They did nothing to stop him. After all, he was engaged in a “righteous cause.” That “righteous cause,” was of course, finding wives. It was an order passed down by the Sect Leader himself.

The middle-aged auctioneer smiled and flicked his sleeve. “This next lot contains medicinal pills concocted by Alchemist Li Tao,” he called out. “The name of the pill is Foundation Establishment Day. It can be used by the mid Foundation Establishment stage and sometimes even the late Foundation Establishment stage. In total, there are three bottles, and each bottle contains six pills. All the bottles will be sold together.” Three pill bottles appeared. When the Violet Qi to the West disciple sampled the powder from one of the pills, the entire auction stadium immediately went silent. The silence lasted for only a moment, whereupon a buzz of

conversation filled the air.

“That pill....”

“It has forty-five percent medical strength!!”

“This is not an ordinary Foundation Establishment Day! Who is this Alchemist Li Tao? This pill is second only to the type concocted by Furnace Lords!”

“The interactions of the plants and vegetation in this pill are extraordinary!!”

Of course, most of the hundred thousand Cultivators in the auction stadium understood little about the Dao of alchemy. However, the interactions happening within the translucent body of the Violet Qi to the West disciple gave some clues as to the astonishing nature of the pill.

The auctioneer also stared in amazement, then looked back down at the three pill bottles he held.

Meng Hao's gaze fell upon the bottles as well. After a while, he smiled. He was friends with Li Tao, and as such, the man had come to him before concocting this batch of Foundation Establishment Day. During their discussion of the Dao of alchemy, Meng Hao had pointed out some variations in the plant and vegetation interactions. You could actually say that it was with Meng Hao's help that Li Tao gained enlightenment that day, and was able to concoct this batch of pills, which was the pinnacle of his current achievements in pill concoction.

“I won't ask him about this batch of Foundation Establishment Day,” thought Meng Hao. “However, the variations I talked about that day could only have extracted forty percent medicinal strength from the plants. The final five percent was an achievement based on Li Tao's personal enlightenment and skill.” Seeing the fervent reaction of the crowds around him, Meng Hao smiled.

Within his bag of holding, he still had several Foundation Establishment Day pills that he himself had concocted. Those pills had ninety percent medicinal strength. If he put those up for auction, it would certainly cause

some waves.

“I wonder what the auction of my Bedevilment pill will be like....” he thought, his heart filling with anticipation. The energy he had expended concocting the Bedevilment pills exceeded that he had spent on Foundation Establishment Day by double, triple or perhaps more.

The concoction of the Bedevilment Pills was the true expression of his will, and the pinnacle of his Dao of alchemy.

With a smile, the auctioneer said, “Again, these three pill bottles will not be auctioned separately, but together. The opening bid for the three bottles is 250,000 Spirit Stones.” In his estimation, the price for these bottles would surely reach an incredible height.

In fact, it might be the crux of the entire auction, and would likely cause Li Tao’s name to rise to prominence in the Southern Domain.

This was because, although he wasn’t a Furnace Lord, he had concocted pills of almost exactly the same quality as a Furnace Lord’s. As such, the pills must have plant and vegetation interactions of his own creation, which was the hallmark difference between master alchemists and Furnace Lords.

Any master alchemist who wished to become a Furnace Lord must be able to produce plant and vegetation interactions that were uniquely his own. By rising above other master alchemists in such a way, he could then advance to being a Furnace Lord.

Because of those interactions, the value of such a medicinal pill was far beyond the value of an ordinary pill. Their appearance in the auction would immediately cause a huge scene. Many people would be willing to pay an exorbitant price to acquire the pills for research.

After all, once a master alchemist was raised to Furnace Lord, he would be able to use alchemic concealing techniques to hide the plant interactions. In that way, it would be much more difficult for others to unlock his secrets.

However, a pill concocted by a master alchemist would contain no such

alchemic concealing, and would be much easier to unlock and research. The East Pill Division was aware of this, of course, and really had no way to control it. Skill manifest in the path of medicinal pills, was innately researchable.

Leaks like this didn't occur in all Pill Auctions, but rather, perhaps one in ten. As such, one can only imagine the frenzy caused because of the appearance of this batch of pills.

The East Pill Division naturally had a degree of forbearance. Since the pills had been put up for auction, the East Pill Division would not attempt to cover up their true nature, nor try to prevent people from researching them.

Immediately, people began calling out bids.

“300,000 Spirit Stones!”

“500,000 Spirit Stones. I must acquire these three bottles of Foundation Establishment Day!”

Meng Hao's eyes glittered. For a Foundation Establishment Day pill of forty-five percent medicinal strength to be so explosively popular caused him to wonder what kind of reaction his own pill would provoke.

Chapter 232: Bedevilment Pill!

“600,000!” cried Fatty, leaping to his feet. “Who dares to contend with his superiors?! These three pill bottles are mine!” His voice reverberated like thunder throughout the auction stadium.

However, these three bottles of Foundation Establishment Day were not like the Barrier Breaking Pills from before, in which Fatty’s bids caused others to give up. These three bottles represented a chance that might come only one in ten years, perhaps even one in a hundred!

Considering the East Pill Division’s lofty status, they could afford to not care about such a thing. But other Sects lacked the East Pill Division’s deep stores of knowledge. Clearly, there were many Sects present who were determined to win this chance to study the interactions contained within the pills.

Regardless of great Sect or small Sect, the eyes of all the Cultivators in the stadium were red. These medicinal pills were just too important, not just to the Cultivators, but to their Sects as a whole.

By fully researching the plant and vegetation interactions within the pills, a Sect could gain significant advancements in their Dao of alchemy. As such, the bids in the stadium continued to flow out, even from the three great Clans and the other great Sects.

Meng Hao watched on from within the pavilion, his eyes wide, almost as if he couldn’t comprehend the scene. His eyes began to shine as the price for the pills climbed higher and higher. After this Pill Auction, Li Tao’s name would definitely become known throughout the Southern Domain. Soon, all Cultivators would wish to make his acquaintance. Considering he was able to produce such pills while still just a master alchemist, it mean that... he definitely was qualified to become a Furnace Lord in the future!

There were only around one hundred Furnace Lords in the East Pill Division. Any one of them could cause a huge sensation in the Southern Domain, and would be sought after by countless Cultivators. Their

position and status invoked solemn respect of the highest order.

Fatty continued to make bids in the auction for the Foundation Establishment Day. However, eventually he had to give up as the price eventually reached the incredible height of 4,000,000 Spirit Stones!

This was the highest price offered for a lot in the Violet Fate Sect's Pill Auction in the past one hundred years!

It was hard to use words to even talk about such a price. Every participant in the auction was panting heavily, and deathly still filled the air.

The winner of the auction was one of the great Clans, the Li Clan!

Only three people had come from the Li Clan. One was Clan Elder, and the other two were Chosen. Of course, each of the great Clans had their own Dao of alchemy. Although theirs were different from the East Pill Division's, comparatively speaking, they were also similarities. These three bottles of Foundation Establishment Day would give them an incredible opportunity to discover new plant and vegetation interactions.

As such, the auctioneer hesitated a moment. However, the East Pill Division was filled with deep reservoirs of knowledge, and as such, they could afford to disregard a leakage of information about plant and vegetation interactions. For these medicinal pills to end up in the hands of the Li Clan showed how incredible they were.

In the past thousand years during which the Violet Fate Sect Pill Auction had been held, the Violet Fate Sect itself had never purchased one of its own auction items. The Eastern Pill Division never withheld items from auction, or prevented them from being sold. Such a matter was unheard of throughout the thousand year history of the auction.

In fact, Violet Fate Sect disciples were prohibited from purchasing items from the auction. It didn't matter how rare a given item was, bids were not permitted.

It was a thousand-year-old rule that had never changed!

After the three bottles of Foundation Establishment Day were sold to the

Li Clan, the Li Clan Elder immediately extended an invitation for Li Tao to come for a visit to the Li Clan ¹. This in turn caused Li Tao to gain even more prestige.

Discussions regarding Li Tao spread throughout the auction stadium. The master alchemists sitting around Meng Hao in the pavilion were all amazed, and began to talk about Li Tao with admiration and envy.

By now, the auction had already been underway for two days. The auctioneer pulled out another medicinal pill, but considering what had just happened, it was impossible for him to arouse the passion of the crowd.

Few people were paying attention, and the bidding was no longer intense. The next few hundred pills all sold within the space of a ten or so breaths. Things were selling so quickly that it hardly seemed an auction anymore....

It reached the point that some people began to leave.

After the wonderment of the Foundation Establishment Day, the hundred thousand or so Cultivators participating in the auction seemed to have come to the conclusion that even though there might be some amazing items yet to appear, none of them would be able to match the astonishing Foundation Establishment Day pills.

To many people a bid of 4,000,000 Spirit Stones was something that wouldn't be seen again in the next hundred years. The three bottles of Foundation Establishment Day were nothing less than a miracle.

Therefore, interest in the remainder of the auction was waning. The auctioneer was well aware of this. He was still a bit excited. To have officiated over the sale of an item at such an astounding price was something he had never experienced before in his life.

Even he didn't think that the remainder of the auction would feature anything that could possibly outmatch the Foundation Establishment Day. As such, he could understand the feelings of the rest of the hundred thousand Cultivators, and was willing to let the rest of the hundreds of

medicinal pills be auctioned off at a relatively rapid rate.

It was in such a fashion that Meng Hao's Bedevilment Pill finally came up for auction, on the evening of the third day. Few of the Cultivators present were very interested. Most of them were still wrapped up in regretfully recalling the events surrounding the Foundation Establishment Day and sending messages about it back to their various Sects.

The voice of the auctioneer sounded out, "This pill was concocted by an anonymous master alchemist of the East Pill Division. Even I don't know who this person is. The name of the pill is... Bedevilment Pill, a poison pill." He placed the pill bottle in front of him.

Meng Hao's spirits instantly lifted, and he took a deep breath. He stared at the pill bottle, which of course contained the pill he had concocted.

When the pill bottle appeared, most of the surrounding Cultivators were still discussing the Foundation Establishment Day matter in hushed tones. Only a few people looked down, mostly because of the words "poison pill," which managed to arouse a bit of interest.

The auctioneer spoke quickly. In his opinion, even though this pill was a poison pill, it wasn't likely to attract much attention. Other than a Foundation Establishment Day pill, nothing else would be able to cause much of an excited bidding. Despite the pill in front of him having obviously been created by paying a Heaven-defying price, he still doubted that it would sell for much more than ten thousand or more Spirit Stones.

Therefore, he didn't spend much time introducing the pill. Looking out, he saw that the vast majority of the hundred thousand Cultivators weren't paying attention at all, he cleared his throat, and decided that the time was coming to wrap up the auction. It didn't seem that this auction would last seven days, but rather four at the most. There was really no other alternative. After the shock of the Foundation Establishment day, all other auction items would really pale into insignificance.

Having come to the decision to end things quickly, the middle-aged auctioneer called over one of the Violet Qi to the West disciples. He poured the black pill out of the bottle and, not seeing anything strange

about it, quickly scraped off some powder and gave it to the Violet Qi to the West disciple.

Few of the Cultivators were paying attention to all of this, and in fact, only a handful of people seemed interested in purchasing the pill. After all, it could really only attract the attention of the few Cultivators who studied the Dao of poison.

Meng Hao noticed all of this, and kept his expression calm.

Only Bai Yunlai seemed to be nervous. He sighed; clearly he felt the whole situation was unfair. In his opinion, Meng Hao's Dao of alchemy was far above that of Li Tao's. They weren't even on the same level!

That much was evident from the fervor with which the Inner Sect disciples of the Violet Qi Sect contended for his pill concocting services.

As for the Violet Qi to the West disciple, he was a young man of about thirty years of age with an expressionless face. Despite the lack of interest on the part of the surrounding Cultivators, he earnestly accepted the powder from the pill and then consumed it without hesitation. His Cultivation base circulated, causing the powder to dissolve into his body. He became translucent, allowing everyone to see the results inside of him.

Despite the fact that this was a poison pill, the man didn't hesitate in the slightest.

As soon as he consumed the powder, his body began to transform.

As he did, Meng Hao quietly looked at him and murmured, "Pierce the Qi vessels throughout the body, chop them like mincemeat. Turn the body into a treasure, split open the chest. Crush the mind, consolidate millions upon millions of murderous intentions. Explode the Dao Pillars within the Core Sea, killing intent can exterminate spirits. Use the mortal soul to fuse with spirits. Use the power of killing to subvert consciousness. The mind and the Core Sea, fused into nothing in the blink of an eye. This Devilish will shall transform into a suicidal heart, which will cause the Cultivation base to climb to the skies!

"It is not a burning of the soul, it supersedes that! This pill... will be

called Bedevilment Pill! That is because, this will, can only belong to devils!” With every sentence Meng Hao uttered, the Cultivator’s body changed, almost as if it were under Meng Hao’s control.

His expressionless face immediately changed. Sweat began to pour down his forehead, and his whole body shook. Veins popped out on his forehead.

He could clearly sense that the powder which he had swallowed had been immediately absorbed by his body and then transformed into an indescribable stimulating force. His body filled with pain, and spiritual energy exploded out. It felt as if his Qi passageways were being slashed to pieces by countless swords!

As this happened, a roaring sound emanated inside of him, as if the unrestrained power of his very life force were shooting out. The intensity of this power exploded out of his chest, transforming into a frenzied desire for murder, which completely shattered his three Dao Pillars!

As his Dao Pillars fell to pieces, his Core Sea evaporated, and his Cultivation base was smashed. The power flooded into his mind, pulverizing his soul, erasing his mind, filling it with a devilish will which would end his life!!

It seemed all of his consciousness had disappeared and he had gone completely mad. He lifted his head to the sky and let out a shocking howl. The howl echoed out, containing indescribable desire to murder, which then transformed into killing intent that emanated out from him in booming waves.

A shapeless Flame Sea enveloped his body, burning it, burning his soul, filling him with a frenzied, devilish insanity. His breathing became ragged, and his Cultivation base.... suddenly exploded upward. He had no Dao Pillars, and yet his Qi was so powerful that it rivalled the late Foundation Establishment stage!!

His roar, filled with killing intent, slammed down onto the hundred thousand Cultivators who were discussing Foundation Establishment Day. Instantly, all of their eyes fell upon the Violet Qi to the West Cultivator.

Meng Hao stood there, his expression calm, his eyes calm. He seemed like... an alchemist devil!

*

1. Just a quick note to remind you that Li Tao's surname is a different surname from that of the Li Clan, both in terms of the character and the pronunciation 历Lì versus 李Lǐ.

Chapter 233: The Earth, The Heavens!

It was impossible to describe how the killing intent imbued the howl which rose up to the Heavens. Its intensity spread about, causing strands of black Qi to emanate from the body of the young Cultivator.

The strands of black Qi swirled around him, making him look like someone who had risen up from the yellow springs of the netherworld. His closed eyes suddenly snapped open, and all of the hundred thousand Cultivators gasped. What they saw were two eyes that appeared as if they belonged to wild animal, filled only with frenzied death.

The eyes were crimson, and they glowed with insanity. From this moment onward, this was no longer a Cultivator, but a devil!!

He emanated the power of the late Foundation Establishment stage; moments ago, he had only been at the early Foundation Establishment stage. Such an explosive transformation caused the hearts of the surrounding Cultivators to echo with thunderous shock.

Because of the roaring in their hearts, the surroundings grew completely silent. All eyes were focused on the Cultivator, who looked like some sort of devilish deity. The auctioneer stared in shock. He breathed heavily, his face covered in astonishment.

This was because even though the Violet Qi to the West disciple looked like an insane devil, with billowing killing intent and mad, crimson eyes, actually, there was also a calmness within those eyes.

This calmness was even more terrifying than the insanity. It showed that even though he was inundated with frenzied killing intent, he actually had not lost his mind!

Furthermore, all of the hundred thousand Cultivators could clearly see the changes within his body caused by the medicinal powder. If the tiny amount of powder that had been used could cause such an incredible transformation, what could the entire pill do...?

All of the Cultivators present were breathing heavily; the answer to such

a question floated in their hearts. Their eyes shone with amazement.

The auction stadium instantly exploded with conversations.

“What... what pill is this!?!? It’s astonishing!!”

“That was... that was just a bit of powder, and yet it caused such an incredible transformation. If just a bit of powder could do that, imagine if the entire pill were consumed! What would that be like....”

“It can cause someone to go insane, and unleash all of the potential contained within the body. It fuses the Core Sea and the Dao Pillars, and emits a consummate killing aura. This pill.... is no poison pill! It could be used at a critical moment to save one’s life!!”

“Poison pill, poison pill.... All alchemists will eventually dabble in poison pills at one point or another. But there are usually no formulas for poison pills. The pill... this pill....”

“What’s most important is the medicinal strength of the pill. I was watching closely, and I think I know. It’s only a powder shaving, but in my estimation, this pill displayed at least fifty percent medicinal strength!!”

“Fifty percent.... Don’t tell me this is a poison pill concocted by a Furnace Lord...?”

Discussions raged, just as they had upon the appearance of Foundation Establishment Day! All eyes were on the black medicinal pill, and especially the mark which was branded onto its side.

“Look, it has a mark on it!”

“That’s... a cauldron! The pill is branded with a cauldron!”

“That’s the mark of the alchemist who concocted the pill! They only brand pills with a personal mark when they are completely satisfied with results. A cauldron.... I’ve never heard of any alchemist using a cauldron as a personal mark!”

“I demand that the auction house perform a test to determine the medicinal strength of this pill!!”

“Yes! We demand a test!”

The demand for a test caused the atmosphere in the auction stadium to grow even more intense. How could the auctioneer have ever imagined that another pill would appear after Foundation Day that could cause such a commotion?

Looking at all the Cultivators demanding a test, their voices growing louder and louder, the auctioneer didn't hesitate. He waved his hand, and two old men walked out from the portal behind him.

Both had hair long and white. These were veteran master alchemists of the Sect, responsible for performing tests of the medicinal strength of pills in the auction. As they walked out, the auctioneer immediately grew very courteous.

The old men had proud looks in their eyes, and completely ignored the surrounding hundred thousand Cultivators. One of them reached out to take hold of the pill. He eyed the cauldron mark, and didn't look very pleased. In his opinion, alchemists who hadn't reached the rank of Furnace Lord weren't qualified to leave a mark on a pill. The crowd could tell that if the man could, he would wipe the mark away.

Looking annoyed, the old man sniffed the pill, whereupon his body suddenly trembled. His eyes filled with disbelief, and he tilted his head forward to examine the pill more closely. As he did, he seemed to grow more agitated. His body trembled even harder, and his eyes grew wide with even more disbelief.

"Impossible..." he said, his voice hoarse. "This pill is an impossibility. It's impossible...." When his voice floated up to the surrounding Cultivators, they all began to pant anxiously. At the moment, they couldn't imagine what medicinal strength the pill must have to cause a veteran master alchemist to turn pale from astonishment.

The other old master alchemist strode forward. He examined the pill, smelled it, and then his eyes gradually began to shine with a strange light. Having seen through the pill, his face began to grow pale, and a look of disbelief and astonishment filled his face.

"This... this is..." The two old men looked at each other, and could clearly

see the astonishment in each other's eyes. Their bodies trembled and they breathed heavily.

“Master alchemists, this pill....”

“This pill cannot be sold!!” said one of the two master alchemists. His voice echoed out, filling the auction stadium. A buzz rose up.

“What do you mean it can't be sold! We asked for a test. Is the Violet Fate Sect Pill Auction really going to break their one thousand year tradition by not selling something?!”

“According to the rules of the Pill Auction, we have the right to ask for a test. You haven't even revealed the results and are already saying you won't sell it?”

“We want the test results! Tell us... what is the medicinal strength of this pill!”

The voices of the hundred thousand Cultivators rose up, including that of Fatty, who roared at the top of his lungs. The auctioneer's expression tightened. He had never encountered a situation like this before, and was starting to get nervous. Suddenly, a new portal appeared on the stage.

Seven people emerged.

Seeing these seven people, the auctioneer's face flickered with shock. He immediately clasped hands and bowed deeply. The two master alchemists' faces filled with veneration, and they, too, clasped hands in salute.

The hundred thousand Cultivators in the auction stadium fell silent. However, their eyes went wide with shock. The seven people who had just emerged were all Furnace Lords of the East Pill Division!

Each and every one had a name that reverberated like thunder throughout the Southern Domain. All hearts trembled at the sight of these seven. They walked out and approached the Bedevilment Pill. One reached out to take it in hand, then examined it carefully. His hand began to tremble, and his expression filled with shock.

He tried to conceal the shock, but the surrounding Cultivators couldn't

help but notice. To see a Furnace Lord looking shocked caused the hearts of the hundred thousand Cultivators to feel as if they were filled with thousands of lightning bolts.

The Furnace Lord's gaze swept across the hundred thousand Cultivators. With an inward sigh, he caused the Bedevilment Pill to float up into the air, then sat down cross-legged. "In previous Pill Auctions," he said, "the East Pill Division has offered one opportunity to test the medicinal strength of a pill. Are all of you certain that this pill is the one you wish to test?" There was no need to wait for an answer.

The six other Furnace Lords joined him, sitting in a circle around the floating Bedevilment Pill. They all performed incantation gestures, after which seven pill furnaces appeared in front of them. Each of these pill furnaces was clearly made from extraordinary materials!

"Each pill furnace that ignites, represents ten percent medicinal strength. This is a fair method, since all of the plant and vegetation ingredients used to concoct pills in this Pill Auction were grown in the East Pill Division. If they were not, we would not be able to so accurately determine their medicinal strength."

Even as the voice rang out, the hundred thousand Cultivators all watched on closely. These seven Furnace Lords had illustrious reputations and commanded utmost respect. They closed their eyes, and a fragrant medicinal aroma filled the air, giving rise to a strange atmosphere within the stadium. Suddenly, one pill furnace began to glow. Next, a second, then a third, and finally a fourth began to glow brightly.

"Four furnaces lit up. That means it employed forty percent of the power of the plant and vegetation ingredients...."

"Ah, so it's only forty percent. That's not quite as good as the Foundation Establishment Day. However, it's really not so simple to compare the medicinal strength of the two, since this poison pill is a completely different type of pill. In fact, I'd say... huh?" A moment after discussions broke out among the Cultivators, a deathly silence filled the air, as if the throats of those speaking had suddenly been clamped shut.

The hundred thousand Cultivators began to pant, and looks of shock filled their faces one by one. They stared as a fifth furnace lit up, then a sixth, and a seventh! In the blink of an eye, seven furnaces had begun to glow brightly!

“Seventy... Seventy percent?”

“It must have been concocted by a Furnace Lord! This... this....”

“Seventy percent! But, what if there were eight pill furnaces...?” As the roar of conversation filled the air, the faces of the seven Furnace Lords flickered, and their hearts trembled. Suddenly, yet another glowing portal appeared, from which emerged three more alchemists, who were also Furnace Lords. Their faces were calm and dignified as they strode forward. They sat down and then produced pill furnaces of their own.

Almost the instant their pill furnaces emerged, they began to glow. Eight pill furnaces, then nine, and finally ten. In the blink of an eye, all the pill furnaces were glowing!

Ten pill furnaces, their glow rising up into the sky. There was no roar of conversation, because the surrounding hundred thousand Cultivators could only stare with blank looks....

As for the ten Furnace Lords who were performing the test, they too stared mutely. Their minds spun, and they panted. An unprecedented look of shock appeared in their eyes.

And then, the reaction came. One hundred thousand Cultivators went crazy. Their minds buzzed, their eyes were crimson, and their breath came in ragged pants. They had obviously... gone mad!

One hundred percent medicinal strength! This was a perfect product! From ancient times until now, such an item had never appeared in the Pill Auction!

The difference between the Foundation Establishment Day and this Bedevilment Pill was clear. One was the Earth, the other was the Heavens!

Chapter 234: Chapter title contains a spoiler and is located at the end of the text

Throughout the history of the Violet Fate Sect Pill Auction, a one hundred percent consummate pill had never before appeared. In fact, when it comes to such pills, a pill of eighty percent concocted by a Violet Furnace Lord would be considered a supreme level pill. Even something like that had never been seen before.

A medicinal pill that could employ more than eighty percent of the strength of the plant ingredients was considered supreme! Something ninety percent or higher... such pills were referred to as consummate pills!

A ninety percent pill was considered consummate; a one hundred percent pill, though generally referred to as consummate, could actually be considered sub-celestial!

Throughout the tens of thousands of years that encompassed the history of the Violet Fate Sect's East Pill Division, very few people had ever been able to concoct supreme pills. Every single one was a Violet Furnace Lord, and every single one had a name which could rock the Southern Domain. As for one hundred percent consummate pills....

In the tens of thousands of years of the history of the Violet Fate Sect's East Pill Division, only two people had ever been able to concoct such pills. One was the founder of the Sect itself, Reverend Violet East. The other was Grandmaster Pill Demon.

Only those two people had ever been able to concoct consummate pills. Consummate pills were not only a defiance of the Heavens, but also a watershed mark in the Dao of alchemy. They were the watershed mark for promotion to Grandmaster!

Only people who could concoct consummate pills could be called Grandmasters! In all the Southern Domain, other than Grandmaster Pill Demon, there were only two other Grandmasters who were capable of concocting consummate pills. However, their consummate pills were only

ninety percent, not one hundred.

In all the Southern Domain, only Grandmaster Pill Demon... could concoct one hundred percent sub-celestial consummate pills!

It is therefore obvious how valuable a pill like the Bedevilment Pill would be, and why its appearance in the Pill Auction would send everyone into a wild frenzy.

One hundred thousand Cultivators all stared with red eyes. The Foundation Establishment Day had caused a stir, but that was far removed from this development. One hundred thousand people, one hundred thousand pairs of eyes. Their minds swam with the shocking sight of... a one hundred percent consummate pill!

Fatty panted as he stared fixedly at the pill; everyone was the same. In the pavilions on the top level of the auction stadium, the master alchemists from the East Pill Division who had come to observe the proceedings, also were completely shaken, their faces filled with shock and disbelief.

It wasn't just them; the apprentice alchemists who were present were in an uproar. Even the disciples from the Violet Qi Division were filled with massive waves of shock.

The entire Pill Auction seemed as if it might boil into collapse.

The auctioneer stood there trembling, his mind filled with thunderous roaring, his breathing agitated and his eyes bloodshot. He had never imagined that he would ever be able to touch a one hundred percent consummate pill.

When he thought about how he had personally shaved off some powder from the pill, his heart filled with intense regret. In his mind, such an action was essentially blasphemy.

A one hundred percent consummate pill could be considered a sacred object to any alchemist, a truly precious treasure. His reaction, his madness, might be difficult for an outsider to comprehend. But as an alchemist, his greatest dream in life was to one day concoct a consummate

pill.

The ten Furnace Lords stared blankly at the Bedevilment Pill floating in front of them. Their eyes shined with religious fervor, and their breath came in ragged bursts. They seemed to have forgotten everything else except for this pill.

As Meng Hao watched all of this happening, his heart began to pound. All of a sudden, he was getting the feeling that maybe this wasn't such a good development after all.... He had never imagined that the Bedevilment Pill would lead to such a frantic uproar.

"That pill... it...." murmured Bai Yunlai. He seemed to almost be in a daze. He slowly looked over at Meng Hao, and he seemed as if his soul had vanished into thin air.

Before the auctioneer could even set a price, the frenzied crowd began roaring out bids. "5,000,000 Spirit Stones!" someone cried. "I'll get this one hundred percent consummate pill even if it reduces me to poverty!"

"10,000,000 Spirit Stones!! I'm from the Mount Dao Sect, and I'll spend all the resources of my entire Sect to buy this pill!"

As people began shouting out prices, the atmosphere in the auction stadium grew more even more frenzied. Naturally, most of the people participating in the auction knew at least something of the Dao of alchemy. It had been easy to establish the value of the Foundation Establishment Day, a forty-five percent pill with a variety of plant and vegetation interactions. But as for a one hundred percent consummate pill....

The mysterious plant and vegetation interactions made its value hard to determine. The Cultivators here, regardless of which Sect they came from, obviously knew that. Any Sect who could unlock a tiny bit of the secrets of this pill would be able to make unprecedented advancements in their Dao of alchemy.

It was no ordinary pill, but rather a one hundred percent consummate pill, something that no one in the entire Southern Domain except for Grandmaster Pill Demon could concoct.

The Cultivators here knew that anyone who acquired the pill and studied it on a daily basis, were they to achieve complete enlightenment, would be able to found their own alchemic Sect!

This pill was a rarity in the modern world!

Even without complete understanding of the pill, any Sect who possessed it would have a precious treasure!

The explosive atmosphere in the auction stadium continued to rise. It seemed chaos would soon break out; some people seemed to be preparing to fight for the pill. Unfortunately, the appearance of the pill seemed to have incited the potential for frenzied struggle.

The auctioneer was incapable of keeping the situation under control. Were he to dare to say that the pill was not for sale, killing intent would surely fill the auction stadium in an instant.

Nothing like this had ever happened throughout the long history of the Pill Auction. The auctioneer's face was pale as he looked around at the frenzied one hundred thousand Cultivators. He didn't even dare to speak.

"Who made this pill?" somebody suddenly shouted. It seemed many of the Cultivators realized that they had little hope of acquiring the pill, and so began to focus their attention on whoever had concocted it.

The question rang out like thunder, causing the hundred thousand Cultivators to suddenly grow deathly quiet.

The Cultivators were still in a frenzy, but they seemed to have recovered some of their wits. As they did, it seemed everyone was suddenly wondering about the same question.

"If I remember correctly, it was a master alchemist?"

"Master alchemist? What? This pill... was concocted by a master alchemist?"

"It... it surely was concocted by Grandmaster Pill Demon himself. How could it be a master alchemist? The only person in the entire Southern Domain who can concoct one hundred percent consummate pills is

Grandmaster Pill Demon!”

The buzz of conversation filled the air, and everyone began to focus once more on the pill. The auctioneer’s face was pale, but he hurriedly said, “This pill was concocted by an anonymous master alchemist of the East Pill Division.” The man’s breathing was ragged, and even he seemed to be shocked by the words he had just uttered.

If he had such a reaction, how much more of a reaction would the surrounding hundred thousand Cultivators have? Upon hearing that the pill had been concocted by a master alchemist, the hundred thousand Cultivators immediately began to pant. They were dumbfounded, and their faces filled with astonishment and surprise.

After a moment of silence, the Cultivators once again exploded with conversations that buzzed even louder than before.

“A master alchemist...it really was concocted by a master alchemist!!!”

“Not a Furnace lord, not a Violet Furnace Lord, and not even Grandmaster Pill Demon. If it was concocted by a mere master alchemist, well, this is a hundred percent consummate pill! This master alchemist... he....”

“Such talent. Such skill in the Dao of alchemy! He concocted a one hundred percent consummate pill! Who is he? Who is this Grandmaster?!?!”

“Such a heaven-defying master alchemist exists in the Violet Fate Sect! Could he... could he be a personal apprentice of Grandmaster Pill Demon?”

A one hundred percent consummate pill was well and good. The plant and vegetation interactions were important. All of it was hard to put a value on. But to compare that to the master alchemist who concocted such a pill, one was the Earth, the other was the Heavens!

It was impossible to describe how valuable such an alchemist would be to a Sect. In fact, few Sects would hesitate to spend any price to acquire such an alchemist. Present in the auction stadium were the three great Clans and the other four great Sects. All of them seemed moved; their

disciples' eyes glittered, and they all had produced jade slips to transmit reports back to their various Sects.

“Who is this master alchemist!!”

“If he becomes a Furnace Lord, or a Violet Furnace Lord, then the pills he concocts will surely be a defiance of the Heavens!”

“We want to meet this master alchemist!!”

As the frenzy in the auction stadium built, Meng Hao took a deep breath. He looked at Bai Yunlai, who appeared to be in a panic. Bai Yunlai seemed about to say something, but when Meng Hao's gaze fell upon him, his heart calmed.

Meng Hao's heart, however was racing. He could never have possibly predicted that the pill he had concocted would cause such a violent storm of a reaction. In fact, he felt a bit of regret. Thankfully, he hadn't attached his name to the pill, but had only left the mark of the cauldron branded on its side.

“Maybe the master alchemist didn't reveal his identity, but look at that cauldron. That's his mark!”

“Cauldron... cauldron.... Don't tell me that's his alchemist name? Pill Cauldron!!”

“Grandmaster Pill Cauldron!” It was impossible to say who said it first. However, it only took an instant for the Cultivators to identify with the name Pill Cauldron. Thus began the rise of this name.

Meng Hao watched on blankly, blinking. He was still feeling unsettled, but at the same time, a proud sense of self-confidence began to fill him. For the pill he had concocted to garner such acclaim was a lofty honor for any alchemist.

It was at this moment that suddenly, a violet glow emanated from the glittering portal in the middle of the auction stadium. It filled the stadium, along with a massive pressure that immediately suppressed the racket.

As the auction stadium grew quiet once again, the violet glow rose up

from the portal, and then two figures walked out.

The person in the lead wore a violet robe, the sleeves of which were embroidered with golden pill furnaces. His long, black hair flowed down his back, and his expression was one filled, not with anger, but with power. He looked to be a bit over fifty years of age, and yet, he also emanated an air of ancientness. It was unnecessary to state that this person had clearly had many years of experience.

He walked out slowly, and as he did, all of the hundred thousand Cultivators in the audience looked at him.

His appearance caused the ten Furnace Lords' expressions to instantly change. They rose to their feet, looks of veneration covering their faces as they clasped hands in salute.

"Greetings, Violet Furnace Lord An," they said in unison.

The words rang out, causing the hundred thousand Cultivators to suddenly gasp.

This shock was caused by the words, "Violet Furnace Lord."

Meng Hao's eyes glittered as his gaze came to rest on the violet-robed man and the incredible medicinal Qi which emanated from him.

Chapter 234: Grandmaster Pill Cauldron

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Note from Er Gen: Many people have been wondering about the title of Book 3 "The Honor of Violet Fate," and have come to the conclusion that it refers to the Violet Fate Sect's honor within the Southern Domain. Actually, grammar in the title is a bit vague, making the subject and object unclear. It really should be "The Honor of Meng Hao in Violet Fate!"

Chapter 235: Apprentice's Fee ¹

After the violet-robed man emerged from the portal, the eyes of the onlookers fell upon the person behind him, a hunchbacked Cultivator. His expressionless face was filled with scars that seemed to be self-inflicted.

An indescribable sense of power emanated from him, which seemed to bolster the powerful pressure which maintained silence within the auction stadium.

“Patriarch Hunchback!”

“So it’s Patriarch Hunchback! They say his Cultivation base is at the mid Nascent Soul stage. Three hundred years ago, he gave up everything to become the Alchemy Protector of Violet Furnace Lord An....”

“For Patriarch Hunchback to appear means... the man in the violet robe really must be one of the eight Violet Furnace Lords of the Violet Fate Sect, An Zaihai!” ²

The eyes of the hundred thousand Cultivators immediately shone with respect. The rank of Violet Furnace Lord was virtually the pinnacle of the Dao of alchemy. Other than Grandmaster, there was no higher position.

An Zaihai’s expression was calm. He nodded to the ten Furnace Lords, then lifted his right hand into the air and made a grasping motion. The Bedevilment Pill flew over and settled onto his palm. He didn’t sniff the pill, but rather let it rest in his palm as he closed his eyes.

Time slowly passed. The surrounding Cultivators watched with rapt attention. Meng Hao maintained his silence, watching thoughtfully as Violet Furnace Lord An Zaihai used his skill in the Dao of alchemy to gain enlightenment regarding Meng Hao’s pill.

After enough time passed for an incense stick to burn, Violet Furnace Lord An Zaihai slowly opened his eyes. His face looked moved, and as he stared at the pill in his hand, a strange light filled his eyes.

“What is the name of this pill?” he asked slowly, his voice somewhat husky.

An excited expression filled the face of the auctioneer. He clasped hands and bowed to An Zaihai, then said, "According to the records, the name of this pill is Bedevilment."

An Zaihai looked at the pill for a long moment, then sighed and said, "What an amazing pill. Bedevilment. Melt the soul and transform it into evil. Rely only on the self to rise to the skies. It is not a burning of the soul, it supersedes that!" This was his attempt to state the essence of the pill. He couldn't possibly deduce the formula of the pill in such a short time.

Others might not understand his words, but as soon as Meng Hao heard them, his pupils constricted.

"No wonder he's a Violet Furnace Lord. In one glance, he was able to determine the true essence of the pill." Meng Hao was lost in thought for a moment. In the future, he would need to add some confusing elements into his medicinal pills, so that they wouldn't be so easy to analyze. Despite the man being a Violet Furnace Lord, the whole situation made Meng Hao feel a bit uneasy.

"This is not a one hundred percent pill," said An Zaihai. "Its medicinal strength is actually ninety-five percent. However, even more deserving of praise is the fact that this pill was concocted amidst alchemic enlightenment. There is no formula for it." The instant the hundred thousand Cultivators heard his words, they began to pant, and their minds reeled, especially because of the words alchemic enlightenment.

"Alchemic enlightenment..."

"This pill was created because of alchemic enlightenment. There's no formula for it!"

"A pill created during alchemic enlightenment is one of a kind. You'll never find another pill like it! That means... its value is at least double!" The hundred thousand Cultivators continued to discuss the matter, their burning eyes fixated on the Bedevilment Pill. They seemed to be going mad once again.

An Zaihai looked at the Bedevilment Pill for another long moment, then lowered his hand, allowing the pill to float in the air. Then he stepped

back a few paces and closed his eyes.

It seemed he had only appeared to verify whether the Bedevilment Pill had been created during alchemic enlightenment.

“20,000,000 Spirit Stones! The Li Clan must have this pill!”

“20,500,000 Spirit Stones! A consummate pill like this, created in alchemic enlightenment, is unique under the heavens.”

The entire place boiled with excitement as more bids were called out. Meng Hao was breathing heavily, and his eyes were shining. Hearing all the bids filled his heart with excitement. However, a bit of hesitation suddenly appeared. After hearing the explanation from the Violet Furnace Lord, he now knew that the strange state he had been in when concocting the pill that day was known as alchemic enlightenment. However, what he didn't understand was that the Violet Furnace Lord had described the pill as one of a kind, which seemed incongruous with what had actually happened.

“Maybe there are some variations that I don't quite understand....” thought Meng Hao, suppressing his confusion and instead listening to the excitement with which the bids for the pill increased. Before, he had understood that it wasn't difficult for alchemists to make profit from pill concocting, but he had never imagined the Bedevilment Pill would sell for such an incredible price.

He suddenly realized that his choice to join the Violet Fate Sect had definitely been a wise one.

Soon, the price for the Bedevilment pill reached 40,000,000 Spirit Stones. Such a price could bankrupt most Sects. Other than the four great Sects and three great Clans, no one else was even qualified to compete for it now.

“43,000,000 Spirit Stones!!” cried Fatty, leaped up onto the table.

“48,000,000!” yelled someone from the Black Sieve Sect.

“60,000,000!” raved Fatty. “Screw your granny! Do you dare to try to snatch my belongings!?”

The price had reached an unimaginable height. To most of the onlookers, this might be a rare, consummate pill, but it wasn't worth that much, even with the added factor of Alchemic Enlightenment. After all, the pill had incredible medical strength, but it wasn't clear what the results would be if it were consumed by the Core Formation stage. Considering it was apparently designed for the Foundation Establishment stage, a price of 60,000,000 Sprit Stones for such a pill was already relatively high.

The value of being able to research the Bedevilment Pill was already hard to determine. However, if after complete research it was found that the pill was effective for the Core Formation stage, then the value would be nearly limitless.

It must be stated that for an alchemist of the Southern Domain to reach the Grandmaster level, he must concoct, not just one ninety percent consummate pill, but one for each of the five stages of Qi Condensation, Foundation Establishment, Core Formation, Nascent Soul, and Spirit Severing. After concocting all of those ninety percent consummate pills, one could truly be considered a Grandmaster of the Dao of alchemy.

In any case, the research value of the Bedevilment Pill was truly hard to imagine. It was incredibly exciting because it was not only a consummate pill, but a supposedly unique pill concocted amidst alchemic enlightenment.

Meng Hao continued to grow more excited. He wanted the price to increase even more. In fact, were it not for his low Cultivation base, despite deep anxiety, he would pull out the second Bedevilment Pill and auction off that one too.

Although, now he was wondering how he would be able to retrieve his profits after the pill was sold. That was a bit of a problem.

It was at this moment that An Zaihai's eyes suddenly opened.

"100,000,000!"

Hearing this caused the surrounding Cultivators to stare, dumbfounded. Fatty and the others looked over at An Zaihai, and their faces slowly filled

with anger.

Everyone know of the unwritten rule of the Violet Fate Sect Pill Auction, that Violet Fate Sect Cultivators do not participate. Earlier, during the auction for the Foundation Establishment Day, the East Pill Division had let it be sold for research without batting an eye.

But this was a consummate pill.... Violet Furnace Lord An Zaihai was participating, creating a situation in which seller was competing along with buyer. Who could truly compete?

How could the bidding continue...?

“110,000,000!” yelled Fatty, his eyes red. He didn’t care about Spirit Stones, but about face. It didn’t matter if he was up against a Violet Furnace Lord. After his previous high bid, he had been trampled upon, which made him extremely unhappy. This wasn’t an actual fight or a battle. As far as Fatty was concerned, crushing Spirit Stones was nothing, and he surely had more.

“200,000,000,” said An Zaihai calmly. All of the one hundred thousand Cultivators gasped. Such a price was inconceivable. Even ten consummate pills, all concocted in alchemic enlightenment, would not be worth such an incredible price.

200,000,000 Spirit Stones could fund a great Sect for ten years.

“200...” Fatty’s anger raged to the heavens. He was just about to increase the bid, when An Zaihai’s cool voice rang out.

“I’m not purchasing this pill for myself. I’m purchasing it at the behest of Grandmaster Pill Demon, as his agent.”

These words caused silence to fill the air. Everyone looked on thoughtfully. Now, they understood. No matter what anyone said, the Violet Fate Sect wouldn’t allow such a pill to be sold. Even if the tradition of the Pill Auction was broken, their mind had been made up. This Pill would not leave the Violet Fate Sect.

Giving no regard to this, Fatty still seemed willing to increase the price. “200...” Suddenly, one of the disciples from his Sect grabbed him and

whispered something into his ear. Face filled with an irritated look, Fatty gave an unwilling harrumph, but didn't say anything more.

No one else said anything either. An Zaihai made a clutching motion with his right hand, and the Bedevilment Pill flew into his hand. Without another word, he turned, followed by hunchbacked old man, and then disappeared into the glowing portal.

Meng Hao watched with wide eyes as all of this happened. Suddenly, he was feeling a bit nervous.

He hesitated for a moment. "Grandmaster Pill Demon bought it. Considering how prestigious he is, he wouldn't... he wouldn't hold back the money, would he...?" Thinking about Grandmaster Pill Demon's position, he felt a bit more secure.

After An Zaihai left, there was no way to continue with the auction. Meng Hao grabbed Bai Yunlai, who looked somewhat absent-minded, and left.

After returning to the Sect, Meng Hao spent quite a bit of time repeatedly giving various instructions to Bai Yunlai. The entire time, Bai Yunlai looked at him with a strange look. The look of respect in his eyes far exceed that from before.

Watching Bai Yunlai leave, seemingly in a trance, Meng Hao couldn't help but laugh bitterly. After thinking about it, he decided that even if someone found out he had concocted the pill, it wouldn't matter too much. Deciding not to worry about it any more, he headed back into his Immortal's Cave.

"200,000,000 Spirit Stones! Even if I only get eighty percent, that's still 160,000,000!" He sat down, thinking about the Spirit Stones, his eyes shining.

Deep in the East Pill Division of the Violet Fate Sect, at the main peak of the mountain range, An Zaihai stood respectfully next to an old man. The old man was, of course, none other than Pill Demon. In his hand was a black pill which was... the Bedevilment Pill.

Pill Demon examined the pill for nearly two hours. Slowly, a smile began to appear on his face. The smile was filled with both kindness and admiration.

An Zaihai looked at Pill Demon, his eyes filled with respect. In his entire life, he had never admired anyone more than Grandmaster Pill Demon. He was a Violet Furnace Lord, but it was actually because of that that he understood the vast gap between himself and his master. This caused his respect to grow even deeper.

Every time he stood in front of Grandmaster Pill Demon, he felt as if he were a tiny fish in the vast sea of the Dao of alchemy.

“Master,” said An Zaihai, “I’ve already looked into who concocted this pill. There are a few problems with his background. He’s....”

“Don’t say it,” the old man said coolly. “I forbid it. There’s no need.” He put the pill away with the wave of a hand.

An Zaihai stared in shock for a moment, then respectfully said, “Yes.”

“Don’t bother him either. Allow this little Grandmaster Pill Cauldron to maintain his mysterious anonymity in the Sect.” Pill Demon smiled, a smile filled with happiness and an indescribable contentment. Even as his voice continued to echo out, he disappeared into the distance. The entire time, he didn’t mention the Spirit Stones.

“Master, what about the Spirit Stones....” said An Zaihai hesitantly.

Pill Demon’s voice could be heard from off in the distance. “What Spirit Stones? Those are his apprentice’s fees!”

An Zaihai watched his master disappear into the distance, and then laughed. As he turned, a name floated in his mind.

“Fang Mu....”

Time passed. Soon half a month had gone by. It was on this particular day that, with great anticipation, Meng Hao asked Bai Yunlai to go check to see if the Spirit Stones could be collected. Bai Yunlai returned in the evening, his face long. His explanation was like a bolt from the blue.

With great care, he said, “I used a variety of methods to ask around, but the answer was always the same.... Aiiiii, after the pill was sold, no Spirit Stones were deposited into the account.... I’m not really sure what exactly is going on, but how could we expect the auction house to dare to go and demand Spirit Stones from Grandmaster Pill Demon...?”

Meng Hao gaped in astonishment. He felt as if he had just been struck in the head with five lightning bolts. His eyes went wide with fury.

“My Spirit Stones! My 200,000,000 Spirit Stones! Pill Demon, you bought my pill. Give me my Spirit Stones!” Meng Hao gnashed his teeth. However, there was nothing he could do except sit there feeling at a loss.

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1. A more complete translation of “apprentice’s fee” would be “fee for formally becoming the apprentice of a master”.
2. An Zaihai’s name in Chinese is 安在海 ān zài hǎi – An is a surname which also means “safe” or “quiet.” Zai means “at” or “in.” Hai means “ocean” or “sea”.

Chapter 236: More Aftershocks

Meng Hao was at a loss because, as far as he was concerned, 200,000,000 was an impossibly high number. However, throughout the Southern Domain, many others were feeling at a loss as well.

They were at a loss because of the appearance of a consummate pill in the Violet Fate Sect Pill Auction, a pill that had been concocted during alchemic enlightenment, a pill unique under the heavens.

The name of Grandmaster Pill Cauldron immediately began to spread far and wide, shaking the Southern Domain. Countless Sects and Cultivators all heard about it.

Although officially rising to the rank of Grandmaster required successful concoction of several pills of ninety percent medicinal strength or higher, the pills that appeared in the Pill Auction always led to a commotion in the Southern Domain. Add in alchemic enlightenment, and this caused Grandmaster Pill Cauldron's name to instantly rise to unprecedented heights. It also furthered the mystery surrounding his identity.

Everyone was in a frenzy trying to determine who Grandmaster Pill Cauldron was. Speculations ran wild. Some claimed it was another form of address for Grandmaster Pill Demon. Others believed that it must be one of the Violet Furnace Lords.

No one believed that it could be one of the ordinary master alchemists. After all, other than Violet Furnace Lords, who else could possibly have such skill in the Dao of alchemy?

Wild rumors spread like storm winds across the Southern Domain. The only things that had happened in recent years that could match up to the stir caused by Grandmaster Pill Cauldron, were the repeated search attempts made by various Sects in the area around the Rebirth Cave, and the matter of Meng Hao and the Sublime Spirit Scripture.

As time passed, amongst the various rumors and opinions about Grandmaster Pill Cauldron, a new theory arose that was a complete contrast to the idea that he was a Violet Furnace Lord.

Many people believed that Grandmaster Pill Cauldron really was an ordinary master alchemist. However, he was gifted with an incredible nature talent of the Dao of the alchemy. Otherwise, why would his pill appear in the Pill Auction? Perhaps even the master alchemist himself hadn't been able to predict the outcome.

If it were a Violet Furnace Lord, he would surely state his identity, and use the Pill Auction to gain fame, and perhaps set the stage for promotion to Grandmaster.

Soon, more and more people began to agree with this line of reasoning. And yet, more rumors arose to the contrary. The name of Grandmaster Pill Cauldron filled the entire Southern Domain, like thunderous storms.

Whoever he was, everyone had to admit that since this Grandmaster Pill Cauldron had concocted a consummate pill, even if he wasn't truly a Grandmaster like the other three Grandmasters of the Southern Domain, he most likely would be in the future.

After all, his pill was a ninety-five percent, nearly one hundred percent consummate pill!

If Grandmaster Pill Cauldron concocted more consummate pills in the future, then the Southern Domain would no longer have three Grandmasters of the Dao of alchemy, but four!

In fact, because of the sudden rise of his name, there were many people who believed that Grandmaster Pill Cauldron already had the skill of a Grandmaster, and that there were already four Grandmasters!

The Black Sieve Sect, Golden Frost Sect, Blood Demon Sect, and even the Solitary Sword Sect, as well as the three great Clans all extended solemn public invitations offering to entertain Grandmaster Pill Cauldron.

This in itself caused quite a commotion, and caused Grandmaster Pill Cauldron's name to shine as brightly as the sun itself.

The Violet Fate Sect was in just as much of a stir as the outside world. Regardless of whether it was the Violet Qi Division or East Pill Division, everyone was talking about Grandmaster Pill Cauldron and speculating as

to his identity.

It wasn't that nobody suggested Fang Mu might be Grandmaster Pill Cauldron. Rather, Grandmaster Pill Cauldron's name was so inestimably high, that those who suggested it might be Fang Mu became objects of ridicule. Fang Mu was known in the East Pill Division and the Violet Qi Division alike for his skill in pill concocting, but when compared to the mysterious Grandmaster Pill Cauldron, no one believed they could be one and the same.

The general consensus in the East Pill Division was that he was a Violet Furnace Lord, who had concocted the consummate pill, but for some reason did not wish to reveal his identity.

There were even many master alchemists who began to venerate the mysterious Grandmaster Pill Cauldron. Anyone who said anything disrespectful about him, would earn the wrath of these alchemists.

While the rest of the Southern Domain discussed Grandmaster Pill Cauldron, the older generation of the Violet Fate Sect wanted to open an investigation. However, the East Pill Division was in a special position; without the approval of Pill Demon, no one would be able to uncover any information at all. The strangest thing of all was that Pill Demon seemed to be paying no heed whatsoever to the entire thing. He wouldn't talk about it, nor would he permit the Violet Qi Division or the East Pill Division to investigate.

Even his own people in the East Pill Division couldn't investigate the matter; it seemed as if Pill Demon had erased all traces of information.

As more and more rumors spread, as more and more people talked about Grandmaster Pill Cauldron, Meng Hao heaved more and more sighs.

Whenever he heard the name Grandmaster Pill Cauldron, he thought of his 200,000,000 Spirit Stones. And whenever he thought of that, he thought of how Pill Demon hadn't paid him what he owed.

"You owe me 200,000,000 Spirit Stones...." Meng Hao felt twisted. Normally, considering the level of his Cultivation base, he wouldn't worry about a few Spirit Stones. But this was 200,000,000 of them!!

Every time he thought of the matter, it felt like a sword was stabbing into his heart. Long ago when he had joined the Reliance Sect, he had thought that he would be able to get rich by working for Immortals. This entire time, he had drifted along, pushed along by the current, until he reached this point. However, he still retained that stubborn desire deep in his bones.

His methods were now much colder, and many others viewed him as crafty and ruthless. But deep in his heart, he was still the same scholar he had always been, and he still desired to be rich. He hadn't forgotten that wish of his.

If you can imagine how much Meng Hao rejoiced at not having to pay back the silver he owed to Steward Zhou ¹ when he joined the Reliance Sect, then you can imagine how he felt to have 200,000,000 Spirit Stones dangled in front of him, only to find that they weren't his.

He took a deep breath, and then continued to concoct pills, a bitter smile on his face. Time passed by, but the name of Grandmaster Pill Cauldron did not fade from the Southern Domain or from the Violet Fate Sect. After the initial waves settled down, the name continued to be mentioned frequently.

Some of this had to do with the mystery surrounding the name, and all the rumors that accompanied it. In fact, more pills marked with a cauldron began to appear in auctions throughout the Southern Domain.

However, the fake pills would always end up being exposed. Furthermore, the counterfeit pills only served to bolster the reputation of Grandmaster Pill Cauldron.

Meng Hao heard about most of these things from Bai Yunlai. Whenever Bai Yunlai talked to him about matters regarding Grandmaster Pill Cauldron, a strange look would appear on his face, and his eyes would fill with glowing veneration. Obviously, he knew that the person who was the subject of such glowing praise throughout the Violet Fate Sect, and even the Southern Domain, was standing right in front of him.

Day and night, both when dreaming, and when walking about, the image

would appear in his mind of how he had held the Bedevilment pill in his own hands as he secretly delivered it to the auction house.

When he thought about how he had held a consummate pill, and about the identity of Grandmaster Pill Cauldron, he felt like he was in a fantasy.

Someone else in the Violet Fate Sect who was moved by the name of Grandmaster Pill Cauldron, was Chu Yuyan. The only thing she heard people talking about was Grandmaster Pill Cauldron. Her own investigations into his identity led nowhere. Furthermore, some people were making vague statements implying that perhaps she was Grandmaster Pill Cauldron.

She could only laugh bitterly about that. She was incredibly curious about who he was, and as she tried to find out more information, her heart began to fill with reverence.

It didn't matter who Grandmaster Pill Cauldron was; as an alchemist, Chu Yuyan knew the skill required in the Dao of alchemy to produce a consummate pill. It demanded the respect of all alchemists. As for Chu Yuyan, her reverence grew, and she couldn't wait to meet this mysterious Grandmaster Pill Cauldron, and discuss alchemy and alchemic enlightenment with him!

To alchemists, alchemic enlightenment was a mysterious realm, where pill formulas didn't exist, and one could only rely on one's understanding of the Dao of alchemy. Using only the materials at one's fingertips, one would create a new medicinal pill. This was the reason that Chu Yuyan so worshiped Grandmaster Pill Cauldron.

Her veneration only grew stronger and stronger as Grandmaster Pill Cauldron's reputation grew. She even begged her master over and over to let her borrow the Bedevilment Pill to study it. When he finally consented, she poured herself into researching it.

She felt the insane, devilish will contained inside. She could sense the frenzied burning which exceeded a burning of the soul. She could sense a profound sharpness inside the pill, a proud will that exceeded Heaven and Earth.

Gradually, an image of Grandmaster Pill Cauldron began to form in her heart. His face was archaic, and his eyes shone with wisdom. He was tall and slender, with an imposing disposition. All of this was based on the feeling she got from within the pill.

And yet, no matter how she searched, no matter what methods she used, she couldn't find anyone within the Sect who matched such an image. This didn't cause to lessen her veneration, but rather the opposite; it continued to deepen.

Once, Meng Hao accidentally ran into Chu Yuyan while walking through the Sect. He was just about to dodge to the side to avoid her when he noticed that she hadn't even noticed him. Instead, she was engaged in a deep conversation about Grandmaster Pill Cauldron with a fellow female disciple. She walked right past him.

Her expression was one of determination, and her eyes shone with a strange light. Every time she said the name of Grandmaster Pill Cauldron, her eyes would glitter brightly.

Meng Hao stared in shock, a strange look on his face. He suddenly wondered what Chu Yuyan's face would look like if she ever discovered that Fang Mu was Grandmaster Pill Cauldron. He also wondered what her expression would be like if she found out that Fang Mu was actually Meng Hao....

Another half month passed. On this particular day, Meng Hao had just finished concocting a batch of medicinal pills. Suddenly, his expression flickered as he heard noise from outside his Immortal's Cave, a hubbub of conversation.

The East Pill Division was usually a very peaceful place. A ruckus like this was very rare. Astonished, Meng Hao rose to his feet and walked to the door of the Immortal's Cave. Down below, the apprentice alchemists were all running in the same direction.

"Grandmaster Eternal Mountain from the Golden Frost Sect is here! He's one of the three Grandmasters of the Southern Domain, with a name as famous as Grandmaster Pill Demon's!"

“Don’t tell me he’s here to issue a challenge!?!?”

“Grandmaster Eternal Mountain used to be just like us! He was an apprentice alchemist who slowly rose up through the ranks. But eventually, he forsook the Sect. Fortunately for him, Grandmaster Pill Demon approved of his long, hard work, and didn’t cripple his Dao of alchemy! If he had, a day such as this would never have come!”

“I wonder why Grandmaster Eternal Mountain has come to the Violet Fate Sect today....”

Meng Hao’s eyes glittered as he stood outside his Immortal’s Cave. A multitude of apprentice alchemists and even master alchemists were all coming out of their dwelling places. All of them began to rush off in the same direction.

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1. This was mentioned long ago in Chapters 1 and 2, as well as a few subsequent chapters.

Chapter 237: Meeting Grandmaster Pill Cauldron

The Violet Qi Division and the East Pill Division of the Violet Fate Sect were both in shock. A disciple who had forsaken the Sect and then become a Grand Elder of the Dao of alchemy in the Golden Frost Sect, Eternal Mountain, had returned. For the first time in four hundred years... he stepped foot into the Violet Fate Sect!

Along with him had come one of the Golden Frost Sect's two Magic Protectors, Tang Shicang¹. The other was a Nascent Soul Elder. Each of these individuals had practiced Cultivation for more than seven hundred years. Despite being only at the Nascent Soul stage, they were experts in magic, and together could destroy ten thousand enemies.

In addition to this, they were followed by a large group of Golden Frost Sect disciples, including Fatty. He looked very complacent, standing there at the forefront of the group of disciples, right next to Tang Shicang.

The Golden Frost Sect's arrival, especially the presence of Grandmaster Eternal Mountain, provoked the appearance of the Violet Qi Division's Dao Protector Wu Dingqiu², as well as several Nascent Soul Cultivators. On the peak of one of the mountains located on the border between the Violet Qi Division and the East Pill Division, was a large public square, where the ceremonies would take place.

Two Violet Furnace Lords from the East Pill Division were also present. One was An Zaihai. The other was clearly superior to An Zaihai both in position and in age. In fact, he was the most senior of the Violet Furnace Lords of the East Pill Division. His skill in the Dao of alchemy was at the peak level, and he could be considered sub-Grandmaster. This was Lin Hailong.³

At the moment, the Violet Qi Division's Outer Sect disciples, as well as the apprentice alchemists of the East Pill Division, were congregating down at the foot of the mountain. They settled their Qi and calmed their

minds, looking up toward the square at the peak of the mountain. Their hearts filled with speculation as to the purpose of Grandmaster Eternal Mountain's visit.

Some of the Inner Sect disciples and master alchemists proceeded up toward the top of the mountain. However, not many were qualified to do so. The entire mountain was sealed tightly, and many who attempted to get closer were turned back.

Meng Hao arrived at the mountain with the rest of the crowd. He stood off some distance away, observing. As far as Grandmaster Eternal Mountain, he had heard quite a few stories about the man throughout his years in the Violet Fate Sect.

As he looked over the scene, he suddenly saw several beams of colorful light shooting through the air. His eyes glittered. The beams shot directly toward the public square at the peak of the mountain. Within were Cultivators of the East Pill Division, all of whom were Furnace Lords.

One of them was Chu Yuyan.

After thinking about it for a moment, Meng Hao's body flashed, and he shot forward. Just as he neared the mountain, he caught sight of Li Tao. Their eyes met, and they proceeded together up toward the top of the mountain.

There were some who attempted to block their way, but Li Tao simply flashed his identification jade slip, whereupon they gave way with respectful looks on their faces. After the auctioning of the Foundation Establishment Day in the Pill Auction, Li Tao's name had also risen to prominence. Were it not for the appearance of Grandmaster Pill Cauldron, his name would most likely have become even more well known.

Li Tao gave Meng Hao a meaningful look, and then, his voice low, said, "Grandmaster Eternal Mountain forsook master and the Sect. It's said that he hasn't stepped foot back inside for four hundred years. I wonder why he's back.... Brother Fang, do you think it might have something to do with Grandmaster Pill Cauldron?"

Meng Hao smiled slightly, shaking his head and saying nothing. Soon,

they reached the mountain peak, where they stood off to the side. Meng Hao looked over at Fatty, and then Chu Yuyan.

All of the Furnace Lords, including Chu Yuyan, stood respectfully behind the Violet Furnace Lords, looking forward at the Cultivators from the Golden Frost Sect.

Chu Yuyan glanced at the Golden Frost Sect Cultivators and yawned. Then her gaze fell upon Fatty, and it seemed as if she wanted to give him a good thrashing. A cold look gleamed in her eye. After all, this Fatty Li Fugui was the cause of the entire scandal with Meng Hao.

The Golden Frost Sect had brought no small amount of Cultivators to this meeting. However, less than ten people actually qualified to sit down at the table. The rest of the Inner Sect disciples, like Fatty, could only stand behind them.

Sitting in the foremost position were two people. One was Magic Protector Tang Shicang. He appeared to be middle-aged, but his Cultivation base was at the mid Nascent Soul stage, and few people in the Southern Domain would dare to look down at him. If he made a bit more progress, he would reach the late Nascent Soul stage. In the current age, in which only a few Spirit Severing Cultivators appeared in the Cultivation world of the Southern Domain, this would place him at the pinnacle of his generation.

At the moment, he was laughing and chatting with Wu Dingqiu over some trivial matters.

Sitting next to him was a white-haired old man. He had been sitting there the entire time, his eyes closed. He seemed as if he did not belong in Heaven and Earth. In fact, anyone who looked at him for too long would begin to feel as if their eyes were burning, as if his entire body were some type of fearsome furnace.

Even more shocking, as he sat there with his eyes closed, green grass slowly began to sprout up from within the limestones around him. It seemed that this old man's Qi was capable of causing living things to spontaneously grow.

This was none other than one of the three Grandmasters of the Dao of alchemy of the Southern Domain, Eternal Mountain.

Compared to him, the rest of the Golden Frost Sect Cultivators seemed to be there for nothing more than a supporting role. Even the Nascent Soul Cultivators were clearly lessened by his presence.

Meng Hao and Li Tao stood off to the side, along with quite a large group of other disciples who encircled the square. Meng Hao looked at Grandmaster Eternal Mountain, and the grass slowly growing up around him. His eyes narrowed.

“What realm of the Dao of alchemy is this?” he thought. “He can cause medicinal plants to grow up from the limestone. That’s creating life out of nothing....”

Then, he caught sight of An Zaihai, and felt anger welling up in his heart as he suddenly remembered his 200,000,000 Spirit Stones.

On the Violet Fate Sect side, An Zaihai smiled as he and Wu Dingqiu chatted courteously with Tang Shicang and the three other Nascent Soul magic experts.

The most senior of the Violet Furnace Lords, Lin Hailong, sat there expressionless, staring icily at Eternal Mountain.

The square seemed to be filled with both fire and ice. On the one hand, harmonious chatting could be heard, on the other hand, an icy wind full of frost seemed to be blowing.

“Hahaha!” laughed Tang Shicang, looking at Wu Dingqiu. “Fellow Daoist Wu, please stop asking. I’m just here out of courtesy to accompany Grandmaster Eternal Mountain. As far as the details of our visit, I’m afraid I can’t really say.”

It was at this moment that Grandmaster Eternal Mountain suddenly opened his eyes. When he did, they were staring directly into Lin Hailong’s icy glare.

He was quiet for a moment, and then said, “Long time no see, Elder Brother Lin.” His voice was archaic, and filled with a strange power. As his

words rang out, the green grass around him fluttered. Instantly, the entire square grew quiet. Regardless of who was speaking, Tang Shichang, Wu Dingqiu or An Zaihai, they all instantly closed their mouths. All eyes fell onto Grandmaster Eternal Mountain.

“You flatter me with the words ‘Elder Brother,’” Lin Hailong said coolly. “Have some self-respect, Grandmaster Eternal Mountain.”

Eternal Mountain was quiet for a long moment. Finally, he said, “The purpose of my visit is to pay respects to Grandmaster Pill Demon. Fellow Daoist Lin, could you please make an introduction for me?”

“Master is busy at the moment,” replied Lin Hailong, his voice cold. “Please leave.” Although Lin Hailong’s Master was not offended by Eternal Mountain’s past actions, Lin Hailong would never be able to forget that he himself had recommended him to join the Sect. Furthermore, he had unselfishly provided him with much assistance. He had never imagined that because of his talent in the Dao of alchemy, that he would eventually become a Violet Furnace Lord, and then forsake Master and Sect. To this day, he had never been able to dispel the negative feelings in his heart.

Eternal Mountain was again silent for a long moment. After the space of about ten breaths past, a glow filled his eyes like that emitted by a pill furnace.

“If Grandmaster Pill Demon has no time, then I would very much like to meet the person the whole Southern Domain is talking about: Grandmaster Pill Cauldron of the East Pill Division!”

Hearing this caused Chu Yuyan’s eyes to shine brightly. In fact, the eyes of all the surrounding Violet Fate Sect disciples began to glimmer. After all, Grandmaster Pill Cauldron’s illustrious name was what everyone was talking about recently.

Meng Hao’s face was expressionless. He had long since become used to his alternate identity. Seeing the reverent look in Chu Yuyan’s eyes caused him to suddenly come up with some very wicked ideas.

“You want to meet Grandmaster Pill Cauldron?” said Lin Hailong, a cold smile turning the corners of his mouth. “He’s here in the Sect. If he wants

to meet with you, then naturally he will step forward. But I have no way to force him to do so.”

“Why be this way, Elder Brother Lin?” said Eternal Mountain. “You treated me so well all those years ago, as did the entire East Pill Division. When drinking water, one must bear in mind the source. I will never forget your kindness.”

“Kindness?” cried Lin Hailong gruffly. His eyes shined with coldness. “If there was kindness, then why would you forsake the Sect?! Do you know that after your betrayal, Master sat on the East Mountain for three days, looking at the pill you had concocted?!”

Eternal Mountain said nothing. After a long moment, he sighed. “It was because my Dao of alchemy differed from that of Master’s. If I stayed in the Sect, then I would not have my own Dao of alchemy, and therefore, no path to tread. Perhaps after many years, I would become another Pill Demon. However... that is not me. Elder Brother Liu’s decision was the same as mine. Our decision was made three hundred years apart, but we both chose to leave the Sect.” He looked at Lin Hailong. “Elder Brother Lin, I respected Master, and I respected the Sect. After all these years, I haven’t changed. I wish to pursue the Dao of alchemy, not just concoct pills. My Dao is not that of Elder Brother Liu with his poison pills, but rather... magic pills! The pills I concoct are not to be consumed; instead, they fuse magic with the Dao of alchemy! The pills concocted by Eternal Mountain are treasured pills!”

He waved his hand, and immediately a gold-colored medicinal pill flew out. As soon as it appeared, it filled the surroundings with a shocking pressure. A medicinal aroma filled the air, but even stronger was the sense that this was a magical item!

The medicinal aroma was like that of the glow of a magical treasure. Its luster was as blinding as that of the sun.

Meng Hao’s heart trembled. Having heard Eternal Mountain’s explanation, he looked at the pill treasure, and his mind spun. Seeing this pill had opened up a new door in his mind regarding the path of pill

concoction.

Meng Hao murmured to himself, seemingly enlightened: “There are millions upon millions of paths in the Dao of alchemy, much the same way that there are countless variations among plants and vegetations....”

“This pill cannot be consumed,” said Eternal Mountain, “because it is indestructible. It is a pill treasure which I personally concocted, the glow of which can absorb spiritual energy. The plant and vegetation interactions within the pill become their own Heaven and Earth. You could also say that this is not a pill, but a magical item that can never be destroyed! Elder Brother Lin, could you please appraise this item?” With the flick of a sleeve, he sent the medicinal pill shooting toward Lin Hailong.

Lin Hailong grabbed it.

*

1. Tang Shicang's name in Chinese is 唐世沧 táng shì cāng – Tang is a surname which also means “boastful.” Shi means “world.” Cang means “blue” or “vast.”.
2. Wu Dingqiu is the same guy who had the bet with Eccentric Song back in the State of Zhao, and then threw the spear into the wall in the Violet Qi Division.
3. Lin Hailong's name in Chinese is 林海隆 lín hǎi lóng – Lin is a surname which also means “forest.” Hai means “sea” or “ocean.” Long means “grand” or “eminent”.

Chapter 238: Determined to Prevail!

Lin Hailong eyed the pill. "Heresy! You're so low, you don't even deserve to make a fool of yourself here!" He imperceptibly exerted pressure with his fingers in an attempt to crush the pill, but failed. He was in the mid Nascent Soul stage, and had reached a point where he could destroy magical items without the use of magic. And yet, he wasn't able to harm the medicinal pill in the least bit.

"The path of the Dao of alchemy is focused on creating new pills," he said coolly. "Anyone in the East Pill Division could practice this heretical art. But no one would deign to do so! This doesn't even deserve to be called a pill!" He waved his right arm, sending the pill flying back to Eternal Mountain.

"This pill was not created from gold or iron," said Eternal Mountain calmly, catching the pill. "Nor was it fused with crystal or stone. It was concocted from 37,924 types of medicinal plants together with countless variations, and is perfect in all respects. It contains the full and complete strength of all the five elements, and is matchless in Heaven and Earth. This truly represents the Great Dao of alchemy, and does not count as a mere refining. Years ago, I observed that Heaven is round, while the Earth is square. It was this enlightenment that caused me to found the World Pill Division, and also seeded my desire to forge a great pill of Heaven and Earth. This very pill contains the Heavens, the Earth and the world itself!" He tossed the pill over to Fatty.

"Li Fugui is a Golden Frost Sect disciple who practices the cultivation of Spirit Stone consumption," he said in a deep voice, his eyes glittering. "He was born with superhuman strength that is concentrated within his teeth. Elder Brother Lin, you call this pill a heresy, and claim that anyone in the East Pill Division could concoct it. Very well. If anyone can concoct a pill that this kid is incapable of crushing with his teeth, then I will give you the pill formula. However, if the East Pill Division cannot do this, then please request Master to reveal himself and provide an assessment of my pill."

Even as his voice rang out into the silence, Lin Hailong snorted coldly. “The East Pill Division doesn’t want your pill formula.”

Before Lin Hailong even finished speaking, Tang Shicang of the Golden Frost Sect cleared his throat. He pulled out a pill bottle from within his robe. It was gray-colored and covered with blackish marks. It emanated a feeling of ancientness, as if it had been hidden away for countless ages.

Tang Shicang only uttered one sentence: “This is a product of the Dao of alchemy of ancient times, an Entrancement Pill of the tenth level of Qi Condensation.”

His words instantly caused all of the alchemists of the East Pill Division to stare at the pill bottle. An Zaihai’s eyes narrowed.

Even Lin Hailong seemed shocked.

The tenth level of Qi Condensation was a legendary realm. After the change in the Heavens, the path of Qi Condensation was not complete, and thus, Entrancement Pills appeared. They were the ancient Dao of alchemy’s response to the changes in Heaven and Earth, and a way to continue to tread the ancient path. With such a pill, a Cultivator could gain a chance to enter into the tenth level of Qi Condensation.

Unfortunately, pills like this were rare even in ancient times, and were not guaranteed to be completely effective. In any case, the benefits of being able to study an Entrancement Pill were hard to quantify.

It turned out, the Golden Frost Sect had come prepared with just such a pill!

Eternal Mountain spoke, neither quickly nor slowly: “This Entrancement Pill is complete. Elder Brother Lin, I would like to place this pill up as stakes of a wager.... Will you accept, or not?” His words instantly put a great pressure on Lin Hailong.

Accept, or not? It was a good question. If he accepted, but couldn’t produce a pill impervious to Fatty, then he would become a laughingstock. If he didn’t accept, then it would be obvious he was avoiding the challenge. If this were battle magic, it wouldn’t matter, but

battling with alchemy was different.... Furthermore, the competition was only a Foundation Establishment pup....

Lin Hailong really had no choice but to accept!

The Golden Frost Sect obviously had foreseen this, which was the very reason they had come today. It was a very serious matter. They clearly wanted to force the issue, and make the East Pill Decision accept their challenge.

An Zaihai's face looked unsightly. He and Lin Hailong exchanged a glance. Both clearly felt themselves to be in an awkward position. Their opponent had chosen a Foundation Establishment pup as champion, and the only stipulation of the challenge was to create a pill he couldn't crush. If a Violet Furnace Lord of the East Pill Division produced such a pill, it might not count as a loss, but certainly wouldn't be a win.

It wouldn't even be fair for a Furnace Lord to participate; the position wasn't compatible. A win would still be a loss, and a loss... would be a complete disgrace.

Wu Dingqiu frowned. As everyone sat there silently, Fatty walked forward to stand next to Eternal Mountain, clearly in very high spirits. He pulled out a Spirit Stone, placed it into his mouth, and crunch, crunch, crunched it into pieces. He looked around at the alchemists of the East Pill Division, grinning. Then he pulled out a flying sword and began to grind his teeth, apparently desiring to sharpen them.

All of this caused the people from the East Pill Division to gasp and stare wide-eyed in shock.

"What are those teeth...?"

"I've heard of this fat guy. They say his teeth can crush flying swords...."

As the discussions broke out, a strange look appeared on Meng Hao's face. The sight of Fatty looking so triumphant, his teeth glittering, caused Meng Hao to sigh emotionally. He remembered all those years ago in the Reliance Sect how he had encouraged Fatty to focus his Cultivation on his teeth.

Lin Hailong and An Zaihai looked even more worried after seeing Fatty crush the Spirit Stone. They frowned, knowing full well they had to accept the challenge. However, if they accepted, it would only be appropriate for challengers from the ranks of the thousand master alchemists to participate. If one of them won, the results would be acceptable. If a Furnace Lord participated, it simply wouldn't be appropriate.

Besides, if a Furnace Lord lost, it would be far too embarrassing for the East Pill Division. If a master alchemist lost, at least it wouldn't be so embarrassing.

"Would the Violet Fate Sect please respond?" said the Golden Frost Sect's Magic Protector Tang Shicang, smiling.

An Zaihai, brow furrowed, glanced over at the master alchemists. Suddenly, his gaze fell upon Meng Hao. It was only a glance, but he instantly recognised him.

"It is beneath a Furnace Lord to concoct such a heretical pill," replied An Zaihai quickly. "However, there is definitely one amongst the thousand master alchemists of the East Pill Division who can concoct such a medicinal pill."

Lin Hailong had just been thinking about how to avoid the whole situation, but hearing An Zaihai's words, he nodded slightly. His heart, however, was pounding. He looked over at Li Tao, who was standing next to Meng Hao. "Li Tao, please step forward and concoct a pill," he said, completely ignoring Meng Hao.

Li Tao's eyes filled with concentration, and he took a deep breath as he clasped hands and bowed to Li and An. Considering he was a master alchemist of the East Pill Division, he didn't need to formally greet Wu Dingqiu and the others from the Violet Qi Division.

Lin Hailong looked at Li Tao with an expression of praise. He had been paying attention to the man for some time. He may have been eclipsed by Pill Cauldron at the Pill Auction, but as far as Lin Hailong was concerned, Pill Cauldron was a mystery. Li Tao, however, had the potential for much future growth. "Take this Earthly fire," he said "Quickly concoct the pill!"

He flicked his sleeve, and a violet-colored crystal flew over to land on the ground. The limestones seemed as if they were about to melt from the intense heat of the Earthly fire.

Li Tao looked thoughtful for a moment, then produced a pill furnace and some medicinal plants and began to concoct.

The Earthly fire given by Lin Hailong made the concocting process go fairly quickly. Li Tao carefully performed his catalyzing and concocting, and after the time it takes two incense sticks to burn, the pill furnace roared, and a white medicinal pill flew out.

Li Tao had condensed hundreds of various hard medicinal plants into the pill. The concoction time had been relatively short, but he had employed all the skill he possessed. He was confident that even a fierce tiger would break its teeth if it bit such a pill!

When the pill emerged, Li Tao didn't even look at it. He simply tossed it over to Fatty, who grabbed it from mid air. He cleared his throat, and then, as everyone watched, placed it into his mouth. With a crunch, the pill shattered.

"I can't even grind my teeth with this crappy thing," said Fatty, his face filled with disdain. He spit out the remnants of the pill, looking quite proud of himself.

Lin Hailong's face was filled with embarrassment. He singled out one master alchemist after another, but the pills they concocted were easily crushed by Fatty, then spit out onto the ground. Fatty's dialogue grew even more arrogant.

"Ai, it seems it really is difficult to find a medicinal pill that my teeth can't destroy. What a lonely life.... Do any of you have any skill? Come, concoct something I can't crush." He looked more and more complacent. The same gall he had shown at the Pill Auction, was now in full force. He seemed very much in his element.

Lin Hailong's face grew more unsightly, and he slapped his palm down onto the table. Looking at Eternal Mountain's expressionless face, his heart filled with fury. Suddenly, he said, "Master alchemists of the East Pill

Division! Whoever of you can concoct a pill that this kid can't crush will instantly be promoted to Furnace Lord!" His words echoed out through the mountains, all the way down to the master alchemists who were congregated at the foot of the mountain. Everyone's faces filled with shock, and their eyes began to glow.

Meng Hao's pupils constricted, and he stared at Lin Hailong, his heart pounding.

Being promoted to Furnace Lord was a very important matter. Barring unusual circumstances, before being considered for promotion, one usually needed to be a master alchemist for a full sixty-year cycle, be at the Foundation Establishment stage, and concoct over a thousand different types of medicinal pills with fifty percent medicinal strength. Even more importantly, the Sect required that the candidate master alchemist have concocted ten million medicinal pills for the Sect.

After meeting all those requirements, the approval of all the other Furnace Lords was also required. If there was more than one candidate, then a rigorous pill concocting competition was required, whereupon one person would be selected for promotion.

Meng Hao had previously thought about becoming a Furnace Lord, and had even considered using his identity as Grandmaster Pill Cauldron to attempt to do so. However, he was still hesitating and analyzing the whole matter. Hearing Lin Hailong's words caused him to take a deep breath. His eyes began to glow.

To him, this was a chance that might only come once in a hundred years!

Of course, many other master alchemists were thinking the same thing. All of them began to pant; if they seized this opportunity to be promoted to Furnace Lord, it would be as if the gate of the Dao of alchemy had been opened. Granted, being promoted in such a way would arouse the ire of the other Furnace Lords, and would likely lead to scorn from others. However, it was still an incredible opportunity.

It didn't matter if one was qualified or not. After becoming a Furnace

Lord, one would have access to many special techniques, as well as secret formulas regarding various interactions of plants and vegetation. This in itself was enough to enable a master alchemist to advance by leaps and bounds. They would suddenly have access to plant and vegetation combinations that they would never otherwise be able to comprehend. The respect commanded by a Furnace Lord was enough to send almost all of the master alchemists into a frenzy.

Furthermore, the words had come out of the mouth of Lin Hailong himself, the most senior of the Violet Furnace Lords, and a sub-Grandmaster. No one would disbelieve him.

Meng Hao took a deep breath and looked at complacent Fatty. Feeling a bit guilty, he thought, "Fatty, brother, I don't want to cause problems for you, but this is my only chance.... I am determined to prevail!"

Chapter 239: Li Fugui – Give Me Face, or Give Me Death!

Lin Hailong's words instantly caused all of the master alchemists to begin panting. Their eyes glowed at the thought of Furnace Lord promotion. This type of luck was incredibly amazing!

If they could seize such luck, it might almost amount to destiny!

It was an opportunity, which, if taken advantage of, would allow them to soar to the heavens!

The master alchemists rushed forward, even the ones down below at the foot of the mountain. Eternal Mountain had never predicted that Lin Hailong would say what he did. His eyes narrowed.

Based on his understanding of Lin Hailong, he knew that the man wouldn't make such an offer for no reason. There was definitely some deeper meaning within his words. After thinking for a moment, Eternal Mountain's eyes suddenly began to gleam. "Don't tell me he's trying to ... flush out Grandmaster Pill Cauldron!?" he thought.

It seemed Chu Yuyan and the ten or so other Furnace Lords present were thinking the same thing. Each and every one watched on with glittering eyes. A faint smile could be seen on the face of An Zaihai, and he glanced briefly at Meng Hao. He was well aware of Lin Hailong's intentions.

In the entire East Pill Division, An Zaihai was the only person other than Grandmaster Pill Demon who knew the true identity of Grandmaster Pill Cauldron. He wouldn't announce it, of course. He wasn't sure of Grandmaster Pill Demon's intentions, but he had stated three times in a row that An Zaihai was not to do anything about Grandmaster Pill Cauldron. An Zaihai wouldn't even mention the name to anyone.

One by one, the master alchemists of the East Pill Division arrived. Fatty was growing more and more complacent. He stood there, grinding his teeth with the flying sword. They glinted brightly. His air of complacency

began to fill with more and more arrogance.

“Come come,” he said haughtily. “My teeth are feeling a bit itchy. If you have the skill, please concoct me a pill that will break them. Anyone who can, I’ll call them grandpa!” One of the master alchemists stepped out from among his hundreds of comrades. He clasped hands in salute to Lin Hailong and An Zaihai, then began to concoct a pill.

It wasn’t just him. Seven other master alchemists stepped forward and began to work. Everyone watched as the master alchemists concentrated on their medicinal plants and concoction. It was a dazzling sight. Time passed, and soon one pill after another flew out toward Fatty.

These pills had been concocted with utmost care by the handful of master alchemists, all of whom had utmost faith in their handiwork. Fatty yawned, and threw all the pills into his mouth. The crunching sounds which emanated out pierced into the hearts of the eight master alchemists. Their faces fell.

“Blech!” said Fatty, spitting the medicinal pills out. “Who else!?” he yelled, looking very pleased. He seemed to feel that his teeth deserved utmost respect in Heaven and Earth.

Seeing the defeat of the eight master alchemists, others who had been planning to participate now hesitated. They eyed Fatty’s teeth. In their estimation, it was like he had a mouthful of sharp swords. It seemed any medicinal pill that entered his mouth would be reduced to rubble.

“Who else?!?!”

No one responded to Fatty, nor did anyone step forward to concoct a pill. Fatty arrogantly pulled another Spirit Stone out, popped it into his mouth, and then crunched it into pieces.

The surrounding master alchemists gasped. Moments ago, many of them had found it easy to muster their courage, think of a pill formula, and then attempt to concoct it. Seeing the spectacle in front of their eyes, however, caused them to change their minds.

They looked at Fatty angrily. They sighed inwardly as various thoughts

ran through their minds:

“This guy is inhuman! What pill could possibly stand up to teeth like that...?”

“Dammit, this fatso must have been growing these teeth from birth. He’s not a Cultivator, he’s a monster!”

“Isn’t he worried he might accidentally bite his tongue off one day...? He actually eats the Spirit Stones? What kind of a stomach does he have? Can he digest them?”

All of them seemed to think that there would be no luck for them on this day.

Fatty swallowed the Spirit Stone and then began loudly grinding his teeth again. From the moment he had joined the Golden Frost Sect, he had been doted upon, and had never been embarrassed. He of course took this opportunity to show off, and was currently glancing around, looking for pretty female alchemists.

He ignored Chu Yuyan, of course. In his opinion, Chu Yuyan clearly belonged to his brother Meng Hao, and he wouldn’t interfere. After all, Fatty completely revered Meng Hao.

Even as Fatty was in the midst of his arrogant complacency, Meng Hao coughed lightly. He wasn’t stupid, and could tell that Lin and An were trying to use this occasion to determine the identity of Grandmaster Pill Cauldron. This was the main reason why he had been hesitating. However, he’d made up his mind. Coughing lightly, he stepped out from the crowd and began to walk over. This of course, drew the attention of all the master alchemists.

Chu Yuyan frowned, then gave a cold harrumph. After a single glance, she ignored him. An imperceptible glimmer appeared in An Zaihai’s eyes, and a faint smile touched his mouth.

Lin Hailong’s eyes filled with a deep look. He looked Meng Hao over closely.

“Is it him...?” he murmured to himself.

Eternal Mountain also looked at Meng Hao, his expression the same as ever.

No one could determine any clues whatsoever.

Meng Hao clasped hands and bowed to An Zaihai and Lin Hailong. "I am Fang Mu. I would like to take a shot at concocting a pill. Would the two members of the senior generation grant me permission to do so?"

An Zaihai said nothing. Lin Hailong gave a light nod, then tossed over a fire crystal, which came to float in front of Meng Hao.

"Heyo!" cried Fatty, glancing at Meng Hao out of the corner of his eyes. "Another kid steps forward. Don't forget to concoct a really hard pill. My teeth are itchy. I want to bite down on something super tough!" His tone of voice made it sound like his whole life was filled with loneliness, and his annoying expression was one that made you want to thrash him.

Meng Hao didn't immediately begin the concoction process. He looked at Fatty, and smiled.

Fatty wasn't sure why, but he got a good feeling when he looked at Meng Hao. Patting his stomach, he said, "What are you looking at me like that for? Aiii, I'm such a nice guy. You know what? This time I won't crush it in one bite, I'll take three bites."

Meng Hao sighed, and a guilty look appeared on his face. He clasped hands and bowed toward Fatty. In truth, he didn't want to embarrass Li Fugui, but this opportunity was too rare to pass up.

"Eee? What kind of an expression is that? Aiiii, fine, fine. Five bites. I'll take five bites to crush it. How about that?"

Hearing this, Lin Hailong's face grew even darker, as did the faces of the surrounding master alchemists. Chu Yuyan glared ferociously at Fatty, and then at Meng Hao.

"Ah, Fatty," thought Meng Hao. "Big bro really doesn't want to trick you like this, but I really don't have any other option..." With another cough, he waved his hand and produced the Blood Crane pill furnace, sending it to float above the fire crystal.

Everyone's eyes were fixed upon Meng Hao as he concentrated and stoked the pill furnace to a glowing red color. Then, he began to produce medicinal plants. Some he catalyzed, from others, he extracted sap. The entire process took roughly an hour. Finally, Meng Hao produced some gray-colored powder. There didn't seem to be anything special about. When concocting pills, it isn't always necessary to use fresh ingredients. There are certain medicinal powders which will turn gray over time, as well as other ingredients, such as Flying Ash Leaf, which are gray to begin with.

Only Meng Hao knew that his confidence in being able to produce a pill that Fatty couldn't crush, was largely because of this gray powder. It was no ordinary item. It was... powder created by the explosion of the meat jelly's shedding process.

Some of the skin had directly turned into powder, which was what Meng Hao had just used as one of the ingredients in his medicinal pill.

The meat jelly's skin was extraordinarily tough. In the past, Meng Hao had tested it on multiple occasions. The meat jelly had a mysterious background, and was virtually indestructible. Meng Hao was sure that there was no way Fatty would be able to destroy the shed skin of the meat jelly. However, his true killing move in this little competition wasn't the powder, but something else inside the medicinal pill....

"Fatty, please forgive me...." he thought. Meng Hao's eyes gleamed as a black medicinal pill flew out, which he grabbed. The pill furnace slowly returned to its original color.

The pill was about the size of a fingernail, and looked ordinary in every aspect. However, it was filled with the meat jelly skin powder. The powder couldn't be melted; however, Meng Hao had fused it into the medicinal plant ingredients. It was less a concoction than an amalgamation.

The pill emitted no medicinal fragrance, and was as black as night. He tossed it over to Fatty with an apologetic look.

Fatty grabbed it haughtily. "I've taken a liking to you," he said. "Don't worry, I'll crush it with five bites, no less." Looking pleased, he popped the

pill into his mouth, posing heroically as he glanced at a few of the female alchemists he'd noticed.

As soon as the pill entered his mouth, he laughed, then closed his eyes and slowly bit down.

"See! One bite!" The words were a bit garbled, but everyone understood what he was saying.

The alchemists of the East Pill Division all looked embarrassed. Clearly, they found Li Fugui to be completely repulsive.

Continuing to talk, Fatty bit down a second time, secretly using quite a bit of strength. His heart began to tremble. Keeping his expression calm, he laughed a few more times, then continued to blabber incoherently about how he would keep his word and bite down five times.

He was starting to get nervous. The first time he had bit down, he'd only used thirty percent of his strength. The second time, he'd used eighty. However, he hadn't even been able to put a tiny dent in the medicinal pill. It seemed to have some sort of elastic element to it. His teeth actually hurt a bit.

"Fatty seems like he'd rather die than lose face. When did he become like this?" thought Meng Hao, looking both sympathetic and apologetic.

Chapter 240: Screw This

“Third bite! I’m gonna take a third bite!” Filled with determination, Fatty used one hundred percent power to bite down. A roaring filled his head, and his teeth ground down onto the medicinal pill so hard it seemed like sparks would fly off of it.

The medicinal pill’s incredible elasticity pushed back against his teeth. The feeling was impossible to describe, and caused Fatty to begin to tremble. His face drained of blood, and sweat began to pour down.

Gritting his teeth against the pain, he called out in a loud voice, “See how I keep my word!? Hahaha! I’m even sweating to add to the illusion... Okay, time for the fourth bite, kid. After this one, I won’t be able to hold back any more.”

How could the onlookers not pick up any clues as to what was really going on? Strange looks began to appear on their faces; they could see how twisted he was at heart. The Golden Frost Sect disciples had especially strange looks, considering how well they knew Li Fugui.

Eternal Mountain’s eyes narrowed. He frowned and began to mutter to himself.

Everyone could see the determination filling Fatty’s eyes; he was obviously going all out. He switched the medicinal pill to the other side of his mouth and bit down viciously.

“Your granny! There’s no way I can’t bite it to pieces!”

A cracking sound rang out as Fatty’s teeth pierced deep into the pill. However, as soon as they did, a foul, fishy, incredibly spicy fluid sprayed out from the hole that had been punched into the pill.

Fatty’s face suddenly went pale white. His body began to tremble, and his eyes went wide, and filled with veins of blood. Tears began to stream out of his eyes, and a roaring filled his mind. It seemed as if his soul were about to fly out of his body. The feeling in his mouth was impossible to describe.

“You... you....” Body trembling, face pale, he involuntarily leaped back and was just about to spit the pill out when he realized that everyone was looking at him. He quickly closed his mouth shut tight, refusing to spit the pill out.

The situation didn't seem to be very complicated, but to Fatty, it seemed as if he were in a living nightmare. Sweat poured off of his body. He could handle foul odors. He could handle fishy flavors. But what he hated more than anything else, was spicy food.

His mouth felt as if it were on fire, and it seemed about to drive him insane.

Meng Hao felt even more guilty. He had learned of Fatty's hatred of spicy food back in the Reliance Sect. Fatty had accidentally revealed the matter to him personally. During the pill concoction process just now, he had intentionally added some medicinal plants which would create spiciness....

The pill was an amalgamation that included the meat jelly skin powder, which was virtually indestructible. However, Meng Hao was worried that Fatty's teeth would exceed his own powers of prediction, and had therefore included a backup contingency.... spiciness.

Fatty's face was bright red as he glared at Meng Hao. His tongue was numb, and his head was buzzing. “I still have one bite left.... you... you little.... you just wait, this time, I'll crush the pill to pieces!”

Everything was quiet. The surrounding Cultivators looked on with strange expressions.

Li Hailong's eyes were wide. Next to him, An Zaihai gaped for a moment, then began to shake his head with a wry smile.

Fatty was just about to go all out as he took his final fifth bite. Meng Hao could no longer hold back. “It's even more spicy the deeper you go...” he blurted.

When Fatty heard this, it hit him like a bolt from the blue. A tremor ran through his body, and it seemed he was too frightened to take another

bite, and perhaps would give up. The people who had been repulsed by Fatty before, now seemed to be feeling a bit bad.

“What do you want...?” said Fatty. He looked like he was about to cry.

“I...” Meng Hao sighed. He really felt guilty at this point.

“Screw this!” Fatty opened his mouth to spit out the medicinal pill. However, the pill was now stuck on one of his teeth, which had punctured the pill but not bitten all the way through it.

Fatty quickly plucked the pill off of his tooth and tossed it back to Meng Hao. Eyes glowing with hatred, he retreated back to his place among the Golden Frost Sect disciples.

Currently, his lips and tongue were completely numb. The words he had spoken just now had been a bit slurred, and his face was bright red. Sweat continued to pour off of him, and the roaring sound continued to fill his head. Tears streamed down his face, and he felt as if his mouth might begin to emit flames at any moment.

Everything was quiet. Who could possibly have imagined or predicted that Li Fugui would hate spicy things so much? Cultivators are not mortals, and should be able to prevent such things from affecting them. Fatty’s reaction was therefore a testimony to the pill itself.

“What sinister spiciness does that pill contain to be so effective!?!?”

“So that medicinal pill... was actually vastly more powerful than a poison pill!”

“That pill... was so bizarre!!”

Everyone’s attention was completely focused on the medicinal pill in Meng Hao’s hand. Two lines of teeth marks could be seen on either side, and in one spot was a tiny hole where Fatty’s tooth had punctured the pill. It was no longer round, but flat.

Whichever way you looked at it, though, the pill had not been crushed into pieces!

Soon all eyes moved from the pill, to Meng Hao’s face. The East Pill

Division, the Violet Qi Division, and the Golden Frost Sect were all looking at Meng Hao.

There were a variety of expressions: looks of confusion, wry smiles, glares of envy. Everyone who knew him suddenly decided that in the future, they should be very cautious about consuming pills he had concocted.

Meng Hao was used to being stared at. His expression was the same as ever, but his heart began to beat faster. He put his pill away, then looked at Lin Hailong, and An Zaihai, who was still shaking his head and laughing.

Grandmaster Eternal Mountain's archaic voice broke the silence. "Kid, would you mind giving me that pill to examine for a moment?"

Meng Hao hesitated, then shyly asked, "Um... Elder, didn't I just win?" With his pale skin and scholarly appearance, he really looked like a defenseless young animal. It was the kind of look that made people instantly sympathetic.

Meng Hao's question actually didn't sound like a question. Were it anyone other than him who responded in such a way, Eternal Mountain might take offense.

Seeing Meng Hao's expression caused Fatty's hair to stand on end. His eyes went wide, and he stared. His tongue was still numb, his vision was still blurry with tears. But seeing what was happening now caused a face to appear in his mind.

The expression on this master alchemist's face, and his words, were exactly like what he remembered from the Pill Cultivation Workshop Outlet back in the Reliance Sect! ¹

"He's... he's...." The more closely he looked, the more confused he got. This was especially so as he thought to how Meng Hao had disappeared without a trace a few years before. No matter what inquiries Fatty made, he hadn't been able to turn up a single clue. But Fatty just couldn't believe that Meng Hao would have left the Southern Domain.

“Don’t tell me... dammit... if that’s really him.... Only Meng Hao knows that I hate spicy food!!” Fatty’s eyes went wide, and he began to breathe heavily. He felt even more wronged now. If this person wasn’t Meng Hao, then he would definitely figure out some way to get revenge on him. If it was Meng Hao, though, he obviously wouldn’t.

Grandmaster Eternal Mountain smiled as he looked at Meng Hao. Inwardly, he smiled. He felt as if he were looking at himself all those years ago. He didn’t care whether or not spiciness had been added into the medicinal pill. The fact that Li Fugui couldn’t crush the pill in four bites was testament to its strength and resilience.

“It appears I’ve lost the wager,” said Grandmaster Eternal Mountain, smiling. With that, he flicked his sleeve, and the pill bottle with the ancient medicinal pill flew over to Lin Hailong. “Kid, are you going to give me that pill to have a look at?”

“I’m afraid not,” replied Meng Hao, his expression no longer bashful. “Without the express approval of the senior generation of the East Pill Division, junior doesn’t dare to allow others to appraise the pill.” Meng Hao couldn’t possibly hand the pill over; as soon as Grandmaster Eternal Mountain got his hands on it, he would definitely be able to detect the meat jelly skin powder. Then, Meng Hao’s position would be compromised, which would lead to all sorts of trouble.

Eternal Mountain stared in shock at Meng Hao’s reply. It had been many years since he had requested to appraise a pill. Never before had any master alchemist refused. Considering his status, each and every one would hand over the pill eagerly. One word from him could cause the name of an alchemist to spread throughout the Southern Domain.

Meng Hao’s response caused Lin Hailong’s face to soften a bit. He smiled at Meng Hao, and nodded slightly. “What’s your name?” he asked.

“Disciple Fang Mu,” Meng Hao replied with a start.

“What I said just now was no joke,” he said with a smile. “Fang Mu, from this day forward, you are a Furnace Lord. I will send people for you shortly to complete the Furnace Lord branding process.” With that, he looked over

at Eternal Mountain. “What now, Grandmaster Eternal Mountain?”

Eternal Mountain gave Meng Hao a long, deep look. Then, smiled and rose to his feet, shaking his head.

“I’ve lost,” he said, “but I have no regrets. With a kid like this, the East Pill Division could last forever. However, first there was Elder Brother Liu, then me. Who knows when the third person to forsake the Sect will appear?” He gave Meng Hao a final smile, then turned and left.

The rest of the Golden Frost Sect followed him. Tang Shicang gave Wu Dingqiu a smiling bow, then left with his disciples.

Before leaving, Fatty turned back with a pitiful expression to look at Meng Hao. Seeing his wronged expression, Meng Hao felt extremely guilty. He also realized that Fatty most likely knew his true identity.

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1. Meng Hao started the Pill Cultivation Workshop Outlet in chapter 11 . Fatty joined the operation in chapter 18.

Chapter 241: Violet Qi from the East

Outside of the Violet Fate Sect, several 300 meter long airships shot through the sky. On one of the airships, Magic Protector Tang Shicang stood with Grandmaster Eternal Mountain, looking off into the distance.

Tang Shicang hesitated for a moment, then finally spoke out the question that was gnawing at his heart. "Grandmaster Eternal Mountain, are you really going to give them that ancient Entrancement Pill so easily?"

Eternal Mountain was silent for a long moment, then gave a very faint smile. "The Entrancement Pill is defective, and I studied it thoroughly long ago. Besides... do you really think that with all the resources the East Pill Division controls, they don't have an Entrancement Pill already?"

Tang Shicang's eyes glittered. After a moment, he nodded.

"Besides," continued Eternal Mountain, "my purpose for visiting the Violet Fate Sect has been accomplished. A trifling Entrancement Pill was well worth it." His eyes shone with a strange light.

"Oh?" Tang Shicang said, surprised. He still didn't quite understand. "But Grandmaster Pill Demon didn't show his face. Grandmaster Eternal Mountain, how exactly did you accomplish your purpose?"

"Who ever said I went to the Violet Fate Sect to pay respects to Master?" he replied, his voice archaic and filled with wisdom. "Master would never agree to see me. My medicinal pill was just an excuse. The true purpose was to get a look at Grandmaster Pill Cauldron!" Eternal Mountain laughed.

Anyone who had Cultivated the Dao of alchemy to the realm he had, would of course possess extreme powers of insight.

Tang Shicang stared in astonishment. "Grandmaster Pill Cauldron? He's..." He was about to continue speaking, but stopped. His pupils constricted, and suddenly, his eyes filled with disbelief. He looked over at Eternal Mountain. "Don't tell me...."

“Grandmaster Pill Cauldron is none other than that young man!” said Eternal Mountain in a voice that could chop nails and sever iron. The words hit Tang Shicang like a thunderbolt. He immediately began to breathe heavily.

He had no reason whatsoever to doubt anything Grandmaster Eternal Mountain said about the East Pill Division. However, the matter of Grandmaster Pill Cauldron was just too shocking, and he found it hard to believe.

“An Zaihai obviously knows,” said Eternal Mountain. “Considering his powers of perception, he was surely told by Master. As for Elder Brother Lin, his skill in the Dao of alchemy hasn’t made any progress for hundreds of years now. He will never pass through the door to become a Grandmaster. He naturally was unable to see Fang Mu’s skill in pill concoction, especially the ambiguous final method he used to achieve victory. Fang Mu is clearly brilliant.”

“The boy is so young, and yet he is Grandmaster Pill Cauldron. This matter....” Tang Shicang took a deep breath, and a strange light filled his eyes.

“For now, the title Grandmaster is out of the question for him. However, he is a truly rare seed.... If you want to offend him, go ahead and spread word of his identity. But don’t forget, a true grandmaster of the Dao of alchemy, is also a grandmaster of the Dao of poison. Wiping out an entire Sect would be as easy to him as blowing some dust off of a table. He became famous because of his Bedevilment Pill, and the mad, devilish will within it. Even though I didn’t get to see the pill with my own eyes, the images branded on the jade slip were enough to cause my hair to stand on end.” His words were spoken calmly, but they stabbed like ice into Tang Shicang’s heart.

“He obviously doesn’t want to reveal his identity,” continued Grandmaster Eternal Mountain, “so you would do best not to cause problems. What I am most interested in knowing is... will he become the third forsaker?” He smiled. His words were a question, but in his eyes, he seemed to already know the answer.

At the same time that the people from the Golden Frost Sect were calling upon the Violet Fate Sect, far off in the Southern Domain, near the Rebirth Cave, was the corpse which had fallen from the sky years before. Currently, several dozen Cultivators were shooting toward it at top speed from a very far distance away.

They all wore black clothing. The Qi which emanated from their body was sinister and cold. It was as if they could turn the hot summer air into the frostiness of the yellow springs of the underworld.

The Cultivation bases of these Cultivators were unstable. Sometimes they were at the Foundation Establishment stage, sometimes Core Formation, sometimes Nascent Soul. Occasionally, they would even explode with the Qi of the Spirit Severing stage.

The so-called Immortal's Corpse had caused many waves to pass through the heart of the Sects of the Southern Domain over the past years. It seemed that the five great Sects and three great Clans still had not given up on their investigations. The scale of activity was not as great as it had been before, but all of the Sects had reaped some benefit throughout the years. Right now, it was possible to get very close to the corpse.

It was easy to predict that in the near future, this corpse would cause an even greater stir, a true commotion within the Southern Domain. Then, vast amounts of Cultivators would come to approach it. The people here now were simply feeling things out.

However, the Cultivators which were now shooting toward the corpse were very bizarre. Black smoke filled the air as they passed, as if their bodies contained, not one soul, but two. Apparently, they weren't even alive, but rather, puppets whose bodies contained discarnate souls.

They moved quickly, and were almost immediately upon the corpse. Suddenly, the smoke emanating out from them twisted and warped, transforming into a sickle of black mist. The sickle seemed capable of slashing through anything. It cut directly toward the neck of the corpse.

It was a few days after the Golden Frost Sect left the Violet Fate Sect when suddenly the so-called corpse emitted a massive roar, the likes of

which hadn't been heard since the day it fell from the sky.

This roar actually exceeded that first one. It was like a gale force wind which swept across the entire Southern Domain, rumbling like thunder.

As the roar sounded out, the dozens of Cultivators nearing the corpse coughed up blood. Their bodies became indistinct, and they tumbled backward. A voice sounded out in their minds which they could hear, but no one else could.

“Screw off!”

The roaring words seemed to echo out to the heavens. Half of the group of dozens of Cultivators screamed miserably as their bodies exploded. Blood and flesh flew about in all directions. Discarnate souls appeared from within, but before they could flee, they began to disintegrate.

The ten or so survivors immediately fled at top speed. However, before they could get very far, their bodies began to tremble, as if they couldn't control the discarnate souls within their bodies.

These people were of course from the Black Sieve Sect!

Even as they left, a new piece of news began to spread around the Southern Domain. A mark of blood had appeared on the neck of the Immortal's corpse!

It looked as if someone had tried to cut off its head, but had only succeeded in leaving behind the mark.

As soon as this news reached the various Sects, large amounts of Cultivators emerged and headed toward the Rebirth Cave. They didn't dare to approach too closely, but observed from a distance.

The news caused a stir in all the five great Sects and three great Clans.

The news reached the East Pill Division of the Violet Fate Sect, of course, as did the sound of the roar emitted by the corpse. However, they were located quite a distance away. Furthermore, Fang Mu had just been promoted to Furnace Lord. Therefore, the Sect didn't pay too much attention to it.

Usually, the promotion of a Furnace Lord was a grand occasion for the East Pill Division, second only to the promotion of a Violet Furnace Lord. However, the unorthodox and relatively simplistic nature of Meng Hao's promotion led to a much more muted reception.

Things were simple, but Meng Hao was still quite busy for several days. He got a new Immortal's Cave and a new robe. Some people might be talking down the method by which he was promoted, but he still received the perks of the new position.

For example, his Immortal's Cave. As of now, Meng Hao had an entire valley to himself, deep within the East Pill Division, far away from the master alchemists. It wasn't large, but couldn't be described as small either. And it belonged only to him.

His alchemist's robe was black, interlaced with violet, and was equipped with a special function. It had with a magical, short-range teleportation ability, which could be used to teleport anywhere within a 50 kilometer radius. After the ability was used three times, he could exchange the robe for a new one.

As for pill furnaces, like Meng Hao's Blood Crane pill furnace, these would be provided to him by the Sect as needed. Before, if he wanted to concoct some high-value medicinal pills, he would often have to trade with others to acquire the necessary medicinal plants. Now that he was a Furnace Lord, though, such things would be provided by the Sect, free of charge.

Furthermore, there were some very expensive and rare medicinal plants that he was now able to buy on credit. Even more importantly, as a Furnace Lord, he was now allowed to enter the Violet Fate Celestial Land once per month! ¹

There were many benefits, and they are difficult to describe in detail. It could be said that in terms of status and position, in everything, he was now far beyond a master alchemist. One was the Heavens, the other was the Earth.

There are a thousand master alchemists, but only one hundred Furnace

Lords. As of now, Meng Hao could look down on all Inner Sect disciples. Even Conclave disciples of the Violet Qi Division would treat a Furnace Lord with utmost respect. In principle, Conclave disciples could request pill concocting from a Furnace Lord, but generally speaking, usually only Sect Elders would do so.

Outside in the Southern Domain, any Sect would attach extreme importance to any Violet Fate Sect Furnace Lord, in such a way that was far, far beyond master alchemists.

It could be said that becoming a Furnace Lord was like becoming a Conclave disciple of the East Pill Division. Unfortunately, becoming a Furnace Lord was predicated on gaining the approval of all the other Furnace Lords. Therefore, Meng Hao's sudden promotion caused the other Furnace Lords to look at him with disfavor.

Meng Hao didn't care, though. Almost the very first thing he did after being promoted was go borrow a copy of Violet Qi from the East. He had been waiting for a very long time to get a chance to do so. As soon as he finished reading it, he went into secluded meditation and began to practice cultivation.

Two months later, he emerged. He still had six Dao Pillars, only now they weren't gold colored, but violet. Finally, he could heave a sigh of relief.

From now on, no one would be able to see the traces of the Sublime Spirit Scripture on his Cultivation base. As of now, the Cultivation he practiced was not from the Qi Condensation manual of the Sublime Spirit Scripture, but from... the Foundation Establishment manual!

Violet Qi from the East!

The manual wasn't complete, but Meng Hao did possess the complete Qi Condensation manual. As such, he actually understood the technique better than the Cultivators of the Violet Qi Division. The benefits he acquired were vast. His Dao Pillars now emanated a threatening violet Qi. The pupils of his eyes glinted with a violet glow, and the Qi emanated from his body was very different than from before.

Violet Qi from the East was extremely suited to Meng Hao, almost as if it had been prepared just for him. By continuing to practice this type of Cultivation, he would definitely be able to form a Violet Core.

With a Violet Core, he would have the foundation upon which to build the Perfect Core!

Before going into his two months of secluded meditation, he spread word that he was planning to rise to Foundation Establishment. After emerging, he revealed an early Foundation Establishment Cultivation base, which offered a perfect explanation for the violet hue to his pupils.

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1. The Violet Fate Celestial Land was introduced in Chapter 213.

Chapter 242: Alchemy Dao Transmutation Incantation

“Violet Qi from the East....” The faint violet aura flickered in his eyes. He lifted his right hand and extended his fingers. They glowed with a violet light.

“This technique is the same as that in the Qi Condensation manual. It’s not magic, but rather, a cultivation technique. However, it seems the Violet Fate Sect has created some divine abilities based on the techniques in Violet Qi to the East.” He closed his eyes for a moment, then reopened them. In his mind, the text from the fragment of the manual floated in his eyes. He had memorized two passages which described techniques that could be used by Furnace Lords.

“Violet Pupil Transformation and Violet Qi Guillotine.” He gazed for a moment at the five fingers of his outstretched hand. Suddenly, he waved his hand, and violet smoke drifted out from his fingers. It congealed in the air into a violet, crescent moon. With a thought, Meng Hao sent it crashing into the wall of the Immortal’s Cave.

The cave shook, as did the entire mountain peak, and a massive curved impression appeared on the wall of the cave.

“That was only ten percent power.” Meng Hao’s eyes filled with a thoughtful look. After some time passed, the violet glow in his pupils flickered, then spread to completely cover his pupils, and then his eyes. Then, lines of violet streaked out onto the skin surrounding his eyes. These were the veins that, in an instant, had turned from bluish to bright violet in color.

At the moment, Meng Hao looked like some sort of evil spirit. A suppressive Qi roiled off of him. His expression was the same as ever as he lifted his right hand and cut his left arm with his fingernail. A wound opened up, but even as the blood began to well up, the wound started to heal. In a moment, it was gone. Meng Hao wiped away the blood that remained behind. There was no mark on his skin at all.

He sat there quietly for the time it takes half an incense stick to burn. Finally, his body began to return to normal.

“Violet Pupil Transformation: what an amazing art! It doesn’t increase the battle prowess of my Cultivation base, but my recovery is far beyond normal.” To employ the full potential of these two techniques would require a bit more practice.

There were other restricted techniques of the Violet Qi Division that could only be practiced by Conclave disciples. The East Pill Division occupied a very high place within the Violet Fate Sect, but as for their restricted techniques, it was impossible to even look at them.

Unless... he became a Violet Furnace Lord. That rank was not just illustrious in the East Pill Division. It was the pinnacle of the entire Violet Fate Sect. They were qualified to read the greater part of all the ancient records in the Violet Fate Sect, with no restrictions whatsoever. After all, in all of the Southern Domain, there was only one Sect who could ever hope to have Violet Furnace Lords, and as such, they were given special treatment.

Meng Hao took a deep breath. Putting the magical techniques out of his mind, he sank into thought. Equipped with his superior Furnace Lord resources, he began to concoct medicinal pills. He didn’t just need to create pills for his own usage. He would use his status as a Furnace Lord to acquire more ingredients, and more formulas, to ensure that his skill in alchemy continued to grow.

Time flashed by. Soon half a year had passed. Meng Hao spent most of this time in seclusion, submerged in Cultivation and pill concocting. Every month he would visit the Celestial Land, where he would acquire a good collection of medicinal plants. He concocted various medicinal pills according to his previous arrangement of three batches per day for Inner Sect disciples. Of course, the prices were now significantly higher. Despite that, his pills were as popular as ever throughout the Sect.

By this time, he begun to collect quite a few of the medicinal plants he would need to concoct the Perfect Core Pill. Currently, he was only

missing a few. As for his own pills, when he created good ones which had a medicinal strength of eighty percent or higher, he would not put them up for sale, but would brand them with the cauldron seal and store them away.

Every time he marked a pill with the cauldron image, an image would appear in his mind of a vast amount of Spirit Stones. He was very passionate about that aspect; whenever he looked at the large collection of cauldron-marked medicinal pills in his bag of holding, he could only imagine the vast amount of Spirit Stones he would acquire if he sold them.

It was impossible for anyone but Meng Hao to know how many medicinal pills he concocted in total during the more than half a year's worth of time. He grounded himself completely in the world of alchemy. The amount of time, coupled with the deep stores of information available within the East Pill Division, caused his skill in the Dao of alchemy to grow significantly.

Now, he didn't need to waste much. It was much easier for him to extract sixty percent of the medicinal strength of the plant ingredients into his pill. He was even able to concoct quite a few at eighty percent strength. After having been raised to Furnace Lord, Meng Hao was nothing like the other normal alchemists, especially considering how he had access to such precious medicinal plants.

Even more importantly, after becoming a Furnace Lord, he acquired the second level catalysis technique. Actually, it wasn't really a technique for catalyzing plants, but a pill concocting method.

It was called Alchemy Dao Transmutation Incantation!

It allowed him to refine a pill that he had previously concocted. Meng Hao instantly fell in love with the technique. After thinking about it for a long time, he tested it out a few times, and gradually became quite proficient.

Because of the gradual amalgamation of his nature talent of plants and vegetation, as well as the Alchemy Dao Transmutation Incantation, Meng Hao advanced by leaps and bounds.

Using this technique to transmute an ordinary medicinal pill enabled him to produce even more powerful pills. This was definitely one of the most advanced techniques in the East Pill Division.

It was also one of the reasons there was such a vast difference between Furnace Lords and master alchemists. It was also why Furnace Lords received such a warm welcome whenever they traveled outside of the Sect in the Southern Domain.

In addition to the Alchemy Dao Transmutation Incantation, Meng Hao also learned a few dozen methods for creating plant and vegetation interactions which would make it very difficult for anyone to ascertain what methods he had used to concoct any given pill.

This was something Meng Hao very much needed. Combined with this nature talent of plants and vegetation, he was able to combine all the various methods together to produce the most straightforward, and also most difficult, method to commingle the plant and vegetation ingredients together.

It was simple, but it involved adding extra ingredients into the mix. Therefore, it was both simple and complicated. The fundamental skill wasn't difficult, but the more complex of a result he wanted, the more ingredients he needed to add. And of course, because of the variations encountered in different medicinal pills, it required careful work to prevent such interactions from affecting the basic function of the medicinal pill in question. There was little room for error.

If the process wasn't performed perfectly, it might be possible to make a mistake and not even notice!

But to Meng Hao, this was the best technique to hide the secrets of his pill concocting. His skill in plants and vegetation was already firmly within the third realm of ten million variations!

Meng Hao was very happy throughout these days. Both his Cultivation base and his skill in alchemy gradually grew higher. His seventh Dao Pillar was now more than half formed. Based on his calculations, he would need to spend at least ten years as a Furnace Lord. He would work hard to

improve his skill in the Dao of alchemy, and completely master the Alchemy Dao Transmutation Technique. By the time he became a Violet Furnace Lord, his Cultivation base would be at the great circle of Foundation Establishment, with nine Dao Pillars. The next step would be Core Formation.

Chu Yuyan never came looking for Meng Hao. When he did venture out, he heard that recently she was obsessed with her search for the mysterious Grandmaster Pill Cauldron. She spent all her days trying to figure out who he was.

After hearing this bit of news, a strange look appeared on his face. During the past five years, he had gotten used to this new identity of his.

Just now, Meng Hao had finished concocting a batch of medicinal pills. He rubbed the bridge of his nose, then walked out of his Immortal's Cave. It was midday, and the sun burned hot overhead. There was a slight breeze, but all it did was blow hot wind against his face. He looked out at the valley, the entirety of which belonged to him.

Over the past half year or so, he had planted quite a few varieties of medicinal plants. The current heat wave caused them to emit a faint medicinal aroma which filled the valley. Being in an environment like this, it was little wonder that alchemists always smelled like medicinal pills.

He walked down into the valley and began to tend to some of the medicinal plants. As a Furnace Lord, he could call apprentice alchemists to come plant and care for his gardens. He could also summon master alchemists to assist him in pill concocting.

However, Meng Hao liked the quiet, so therefore hadn't called for any help. As for Bai Yunlai, every time he met Meng Hao, he would treat him with the ultimate level of respect. Meng Hao had thought of asking him to come live in the valley. If he did, though, the man would never be able to rest, and would be extremely out of sorts.

There was nothing Meng Hao could do about it. It was exacerbated by the fact that while no one on the outside knew anything about Grandmaster Pill Cauldron, Bai Yunlai did. Whenever he looked at Meng

Hao, his eyes would fill with fervent ardor and respect. Meng Hao could only laugh bitterly at this.

He was there in his garden tending to medicinal plants when suddenly his expression flickered. Behind him, two apprentice alchemists, each about thirty years of age, hurried into the valley.

As soon as they entered, they saw him, and their eyes filled with respect. Clasp hands, they bowed and said, "Greetings, Grandmaster Fang."

Meng Hao thought for a moment as he reached down to pluck some withered leaves off of a medicinal plant. After becoming a Furnace Lord, he had given one lecture about plants and vegetation. After calculating for a moment in his mind, he realized that it was about time for him to give another. "Time for another lecture?" he asked indifferently.

This was one of the responsibilities of Furnace Lords. They were like Masters to the master alchemists and Patriarchs to the apprentice alchemists. By means of their lectures, it was ensured that the junior generation of the Sect would continue to advance and grow.

These two apprentice alchemists had been assigned to Meng Hao as servants to handle various trivial matters for him. "Grandmaster Fang, it was actually two days ago.... However you never came out, and we didn't want to disturb you."

Meng Hao nodded. He finished tending to the medicinal plants, then followed the two apprentice alchemists out of the valley. As they walked through the East Pill Division, each and every apprentice alchemist he ran into was extremely respectful. They saw his long black robe, interlaced with violet trim, and immediately knew his rank.

There were only around one hundred Furnace Lords in the entire Violet Fate Sect, as opposed to the over one hundred thousand disciples in the East Pill Division alone. It was impossible for one hundred people to remember one hundred thousand people, but for one hundred thousand people to remember one hundred people was very easy.

As soon as Meng Hao appeared, everyone recognized him. This was Fang Mu, who had risen to Furnace Lord just half a year ago. It didn't matter

how he had been promoted, his black and violet robe clearly announced his status. In the East Pill Division, he might not have supreme power, but his illustriousness was incredible.

Even the master alchemists who caught sight of Meng Hao treated him with utmost respect.

He walked the entire way, and was saluted the whole time.

Chapter 243: I Dare You To Say That Again!

One of the valleys in the East Pill Division was called Alchemy Day Valley. Twenty thousand people were gathered, seated in a semi-circle around a high platform.

This was one of three locations where Furnace Lords would give lectures about alchemy. Back when Meng Hao had been an apprentice alchemist, he would often go to those three places to hear the Furnace Lords speak about medicinal pills, plants and vegetation. The benefits he had received were significant.

In addition to these three valleys, there were ten other valleys where master alchemists would lecture. It was for this reason that Meng Hao felt as if the East Pill Division was not a Sect, but rather an institute of higher learning. Thirteen valleys existed in which either master alchemists or Furnace Lords would come to lecture, not because they were required to, but because they wanted to.

Furthermore, the content of the lectures of the various master alchemists and Furnace Lords was always different. The Cultivators of the East Pill Division could choose which lectures they wished to attend.

Some lectures would be attended by only a few hundred or thousand. Others would be packed. Of course, the lectures by the Furnace Lords were usually different from those of the master alchemists. The Furnace Lord lectures were always extremely popular.

Except... Meng Hao's first lecture after becoming a Furnace Lord had only been attended by a few thousand. It was by no means packed. Meng Hao hadn't really cared, though. He had spoken for about four hours, then flicked his sleeve and left.

Accompanied by the two apprentice alchemists, Meng Hao arrived at Alchemy Day Valley. He hadn't minded when his first lecture was sparsely attended. However, he was shocked to see how many people were

currently in the valley.

As he approached, he could see apprentice alchemists sitting cross-legged everywhere, as well as some master alchemists. All of them were looking up at the high platform. There stood a white-haired old man who emanated the aura of a transcendent being.

The old man was a Furnace Lord, and a very senior ranking one at that. He spoke in a cool voice which rang out in all directions. Everyone could hear very clearly. Some people's eyes glowed brightly, apparently in the midst of enlightenment.

Meng Hao's lecture slot was actually a few days previous; unfortunately, he had been delayed because of his pill concocting. Now, he would have to wait for this senior Furnace Lord to finish his lecture before he could take his turn.

He would have to wait, but as a Furnace Lord, he wouldn't have to wait outside the valley. As soon as he entered, he was noticed by the nearby apprentice alchemists. One head after another turned to look at him, whereupon they would stand and salute him respectfully. He smiled and nodded in return. They parted, making a path for him, which he walked down, feeling a bit embarrassed.

It didn't take long before everyone in the entire valley had caught sight of him, including attendees far off in the distance. Even they stood to salute him in greeting.

In short, his entrance to the valley caused a small-scale commotion. The old man on the stage frowned and stopped talking, eyeing Meng Hao with a look of displeasure.

"Alchemist Fang, don't tell me you're unaware of the rules?" he said coolly, his voice sounding out clearly throughout the valley. "I'm giving a lecture on alchemy at the moment. Why, pray tell, are you here? This ruckus is really ruining my mood!"

Meng Hao glanced at the old man with a slight frown. He knew the other Furnace Lords weren't too happy with him. Were the situation different, Meng Hao wouldn't let the man's words slide. However, his

presence here really did cause a commotion, and he had interrupted the man's lecture.

"Forgive my inconsiderateness," said Meng Hao with a slight smile, and then sat down off to the side. He was here, so he might as well wait for the lecture to finish.

Hearing this, the old man snorted coldly, then ignored Meng Hao and continued with the lecture.

Time passed by slowly. The old Furnace Lord prattled on, occasionally holding up some medicinal plants to analyze. The surrounding apprentice alchemists listened thoughtfully. Many appeared to have looks of enlightenment on their faces. It seemed as if they were really benefiting from the lecture.

Meng Hao, however, was feeling a bit drowsy. Strangely, it seemed he was the only one. Perhaps it was because he was tired from his pill concocting; plus, the old man lectured in a very wordy way. Generally, after only one sentence, Meng Hao would understand the point he was trying to make. But then the man would go on to explain with ten or more additional sentences. Furthermore, Meng Hao was already familiar with the aspects of plant and vegetation variations about which he lectured. Among the Furnace Lords, if Meng Hao placed second in terms of plants and vegetation knowledge, then there was no first.

Whatever reasons Meng Hao had for being bored, the man was giving a lecture about alchemy. He may be long-winded, but Meng Hao would not do anything to supplant him. Do not do to others what you would not wish them to do to you.

After some time passed, though, he couldn't hold back from letting out a yawn. He wasn't located very far away from the lecture platform, so the long-winded old man noticed, and was clearly displeased. His mood seemed to sink even lower than before. Seeing Meng Hao's indolent attitude, he suddenly got angry.

He stopped lecturing and looked at Meng Hao; his eyes burned and his words were ear-piercing: "Furnace Lord Fang Mu, don't tell me you have

some doubts regarding my lecture!?”

As soon as the words left his mouth, the surrounding apprentice alchemists no longer had entranced looks on their faces. Instead, they looked excitedly toward Meng Hao.

From the look of things, it seemed the entranced looks on their faces just now had been there out of force of habit. Some may have been real, but the majority were apparently fake.

Silence reigned among the apprentice alchemists, but a variety of thoughts ran through their heads.

“Two Furnace Lords are arguing. I’ve been to lots of lectures, but I’ve never seen anything like this before!”

“Furnace Lord Zhou sure can talk. If he’s not happy during his lecture then he’ll really flip out. That’s why we all have to pretend to be so interested. If we don’t, bad luck will surely strike....”

“Ah, that’s the new guy who’s on the rise. All the Violet Qi Division Inner Sect disciples are crazy over Furnace Lord Fang. Furnace Lord Zhou, on the other hand, is one of the most qualified of all the Furnace Lords. I wonder which one will come out on top...?”

Meng Hao frowned and looked up at the old man named Zhou.

“I don’t doubt anything you’ve said, Furnace Lord Zhou,” he said coolly. “I’m just a bit exhausted from concocting pills and need a short rest.”

Seeing Meng Hao back down twice in a row caused contempt to flicker in old man Zhou’s eyes. “Lies! You’re clearly being disrespectful on purpose! Please, I would very much like for you to explain in detail what various doubts you have. If you’re unable to, then please leave immediately. I’m really fed up with your ‘resting’ here!”

A cold glow appeared in Meng Hao’s eyes. He had already backed down twice in a row. He knew that it truly was improper for him to have interrupted the man’s lecture, but the man was really going overboard. Although Meng Hao had a relatively good temper, the cold light in his eyes showed the level of his displeasure.

“Originally, I, Fang Mu, did not want to cause any embarrassment because of the black Furnace Lord’s robe which you wear.” Meng Hao’s indifferent voice suddenly turned sharp. “But since Furnace Lord Zhou is so insistent, then I guess I will express a few doubts!”

Instantly, all of the surrounding apprentice alchemists perked up. Something interesting was about to happen! Even the master alchemists’ eyes began to glow. These expressions were far more genuinely enthusiastic than those from moments ago.

The man named Zhou gave a cold harrumph, and was about to say something, when Meng Hao interrupted him without the slightest trace of politeness.

“According to your understanding of the Dao of alchemy, one must first embrace into one’s heart all of the variations of plants and vegetation, and then craft out a thorough plan. Afterwards pills may be concocted. This concept is nothing more than a load of dog crap!”

“Fang Mu, you’ve really got guts!” roared the man, glaring furiously. “I dare you to say that again!”

When Meng Hao replied, his voice was calm, but his words were aggressive and menacing. “What pills do you intend to concoct with such a method? The Dao of alchemy was created by the Heavens, and requires personal enlightenment. Success can only come after constant defeat and subsequent improvement. It is the result of the concoction process itself! When concocting, one must identify what is true from what is false, select the proper time and location, adjust the flame to the proper temperature, and modify the interactions between the medicinal plants! Was I mistaken to say your words are dog crap? You want me to say it again? You’re the senior, so in accord with your demand, I’ll say it again. Your words are a load of dog crap!”

The words blew over Zhou, making him so angry that his body trembled. He lifted a finger and pointed at Meng Hao, a ferocious look filling his eyes. “Treason! Heresy!” he shrieked. “There are rules on the path of medicinal pills! You ignorant child! The fact that you finagled your way

into a Furnace Lord promotion is a humiliation to all other Furnace Lords. We're ashamed to even be associated with you. Apparently, you aren't familiar with the word 'rule,' or the term 'pill formula.' Pill formulas themselves are rules. The pill concocting to which I refer is one in which a pill formula is followed!"

"Pill formulas are merely a simplified a way of recording the process of pill concoction," replied Meng Hao calmly. "They are there for alchemists to refer to, like a roadmap, or a light to use on a dark night."

"You...."

Meng Hao's words were growing more relentless. "If you follow a pill formula, then of course you can concoct a pill. But if you concoct pills in such a way, doesn't that make you a mere master alchemist? Do you really deserve the title of Furnace Lord? It seems to me that you're nothing more than a boring old pill-concocting puppet!"

"Y-you.... Pill formulas are rules! You...." The old mans sputtered in his anger, and was about to continue to explain when Meng Hao held his head high and interrupted again.

"You can't even speak clearly! Pill formulas are rules? Examine all of the pills that exist under heaven. How many of those pills have a variety of formulas which have been handed down throughout the generations? In fact, for some pills, more than a hundred formulas exist, all with different interactions. And yet, each one produces the same pill. You speak of rules. Are you trying to say that multiple sets of different rules exist for each pill?!"

"Very well, assuming there really are rules, then after the first pill formula appeared, who was it that created the second pill formula? What about the third? Or the fourth? By the time you reach the hundredth pill formula, can you explain who exactly created that pill?" Meng Hao's indignant words filled the entire valley. All of the apprentice alchemists who were listening had looks of excitement on their faces, as well as the glow of enlightenment. The master alchemists were panting as they pondered Meng Hao's words. The looks on their faces were much similar

to the looks on their faces as they had been listening to Zhou's lecture just now. However, the difference between the words of the two different Furnace Lords was incredible.

Zhou's fury rose to the heavens. His entire body shook as he howled: "Treason! Heresy! Rebellion against the Dao of alchemy...!"

"Do you dare to proclaim that the creator of the next pill formula, the one hundred and first, isn't among the East Pill Division disciples present today?" Hearing this caused a wave of excitement to pass through the apprentice alchemists. Ignoring old man Zhou, they immediately spoke out their agreement.

Meng Hao's words smashed down onto old man Zhou like an iron hammer. He couldn't help but walk back a few steps, staring back at Meng Hao with bloodshot eyes.

Chapter 244: Debate in the Alchemy Valley

“Can you say anything other than the words ‘treason,’ ‘heresy’ and ‘rebellion against the Dao of alchemy?’” Meng Hao sat there cross-legged, as calm as a spring breeze. His expression hadn’t changed; he still had a smile on his face. But his words were incredibly sharp. The surrounding apprentice alchemists watched on, their faces shining with admiration.

Zhou burned with wrath, and his mind was reeling. His words began to grow more venomous. “You ignorant youth!” he said. “You don’t even know what it means to concoct pills. I suggest you get the hell out of the Sect and go back to suck your mother’s teat! Wait until....”

His words only caused Meng Hao’s smile to disappear. The cold look in his eye grew icy. “You don’t even deserve to utter the words ‘concoct pills.’ Medicinal pills are concocted, and concocting requires intelligence. That’s why it’s called concocting. Your Dao of alchemy is nothing more than copying. Concocting pills and copying pills. That’s a difference of only one word. The crux of the difference, however, is that your Dao of alchemy reached the end of its road years ago!”

“Lies! Lies!” howled Zhou, his hair in disarray as he glared at Meng Hao. He had always thought his own words to be sharp, but today he found out that Fang Mu’s words were beyond sharp; they were diabolical. He took a deep breath to clear his mind, and then made his counterattack. “How could you blaspheme the rules of the Dao of alchemy? They have been passed down amongst alchemists for tens of thousands of years. If you don’t respect the rules, then you are concocting not pills, but abominations!”

“Abominations?” said Meng Hao with a cold smile. He stretched out his right hand. “Apprentice alchemists, does anyone present happen to have a medicinal pill on hand? Give it to me!”

As soon as his words rang out, one of the cleverest of the nearby apprentice alchemists quickly produced a medicinal pill and handed it to

Meng Hao. Everyone one else looked on.

Meng Hao took the pill, glanced at it for a moment, then looked back at Zhou.

“This is a Qi Condensation Pill of twenty percent medicinal strength. Currently, there are ninety seven formulas for this pill. Now, I will help you to understand what rules are! The first formula for this pill requires three leaves of Blood Cinnabar grass, root of Blue Residual, Gyrfalcon leaf vein.... The second formula requires.... The third formula....” Without stopping, Meng Hao slowly recited all ninety seven different formulas. All present were disciples of the East Pill Division, including master alchemists, some of whom were recording the information as Meng Hao spoke it. When he finished reciting all ninety seven formulas, there was a deathly silence.

All the formulas he had recited were correct; each one could be used to concoct a Qi Condensation Pill.

“The ninety eighth formula requires three pistils from Eastern Dust Flower, three Spicewood seedlings, a flaming leaf from a Luan Phoenix plant.... The ninety ninth pill formula requires East Path sap; three years, seven month, nine day old Ink leaf, as well as.... The one hundred and third formula.... The one hundred and seventeenth formula....”

Everything was completely silent. The old man named Zhou stared with mute astonishment at Meng Hao. It wasn't just him. All of the apprentice alchemists and master alchemists were staring blankly at him as if he weren't even human.

No one had ever heard of the final twenty formulas he had recited. Based on the thoughtful look on his face, it was obvious Meng Hao was not reciting them from memory, but rather, had spontaneously created them himself after looking at the pill.

Such actions were exponentially more incisive than any of Meng Hao's previous words. After he finished reciting all one hundred and seventeen pill formulas, the space of ten breaths passed in which no one said anything. Then, everyone exploded into a huge hubbub.

“He created pill formulas!! What realm is this? No wonder he’s a Furnace Lord! This is just astonishing!”

“He didn’t just create one pill formula, but twenty! I was listening carefully, and I can say with ninety percent confidence that all of them could be used to concoct a Qi Condensation Pill!”

“That’s Instantaneous Formula Scrying! According to legend, only Violet Furnace Lords with incredible skill in the Dao of alchemy can do such a thing!”

Up on the stage, old man Zhou’s face was pale white. His breathing was ragged, his expression lifeless as he stared dully at Meng Hao. His mind roared as if with thunder.

“Could I be mistaken...? Is my Dao of alchemy flawed...? Impossible, I couldn’t be mistaken. If I were, how could I have become a Furnace Lord? But.... but if I’m not mistaken, how come my skill in the Dao of alchemy hasn’t improved for an entire sixty year cycle....?”

“I just created twenty pill formulas. According to Furnace Lord Zhou’s logic, I, Fang Mu, am the maker of rules!” Meng Hao flicked his sleeve, sending the medicinal pill in his hand flying back to the apprentice alchemist who had given it to him. The apprentice alchemist clutched it excitedly. He had already decided to save this pill as a keepsake for the rest of his life.

Meng Hao’s words slammed like a thunderclap into old man Zhou’s ears. His face drained of blood, and his body trembled. His eyes were filled with veins of blood.

“Cease your ravings! Everything you’ve said is a contradiction of the East Pill Division’s Dao of alchemy! You’re simply trying to sow seeds of doubt in my heart. Such actions are worthy of execution!! My unfamiliarity with those pill formulas proves only that I’m unaware of where you acquired them! You’re just trying to put on a show!”

In Meng Hao’s mind, this old man was tenaciously annoying. A cold smile spread on his face as he retorted: “Oh? I’m just trying to put on a show? Furnace Lord Zhou, let me ask you this. What medicinal plant were

you just holding in your hand?”

“Medicinal plant?” Old man Zhou was so furious that he could only stare blankly for a moment. He slapped his bag of holding to produce the medicinal plant he had been lecturing about earlier. “This is Seven Leaf clove....”

He was about to continue talking when Meng Hao let out an uproarious laugh. “Seven Leaf clove thrives on light which contains opposing Yin and Yang properties. It only grows during the evening, when the sun and moon shine together. Furthermore, at dusk, it will shine with a glow that contains seven colors. It looks almost exactly the same as Confusion Apex leaf and Blue Dawn leaf. The only way to tell the difference is by examining the stems, leaves and branches. The sky conditions can also be used as a determining factor.” Meng Hao’s gaze was as cold as ice. “Obviously, the plant you are holding in your hand is not Seven Leaf clove, but Blue Dawn leaf!”

His words sent the valley into an uproar. All of the apprentice alchemists turned their heads to look at old man Zhou, whose face instantly tightened. To misidentify a medicinal plant would lead to an incredible loss of face within the Sect.

More importantly if Zhou, as a Furnace Lord, had misidentified a medicinal plant, it could have a destructive effect on his reputation.

“Dusk is about to fall,” said Meng Hao in a voice that could sever nails and chop iron. “Soon the sun and the moon will shine together in the sky. If that plant you’re holding is really Seven Leaf clove, then it will glow with seven colors, and prove that I am wrong. In that case, I will humbly apologize to you in front of all the Sect disciples here today. Furthermore, in the future, I will never dare to place myself in your presence.” He flicked his sleeve.

The debate with old man Zhou had long since gone past the appointed time to end the lecture. Dusk was about to fall, and the moon was just becoming visible.

The debate had gone on for a long time, but the apprentice and master

alchemists present could barely hold back their enthusiasm. They were virtually entranced with the proceedings.

“Nonsense!” fumed old man Zhou. “I’m one hundred and thirty seven years old! How old are you? How could I possibly misidentify... huh?” Before he could finish, the sky grew dark as dusk arrived. The sun and moon were both shining in the sky!

However, as the light of dusk fell onto the medicinal plant in his hand, no trace of a seven-colored glow could be seen. Meng Hao didn’t need to say another word. The buzz of conversation lifted up from the apprentice alchemists in the valley.

“That’s not Seven Leaf clove!!”

“I can’t believe... Furnace Lord Zhou actually pulled out the wrong medicinal plant!”

“If he can’t even produce the right medicinal plant, who could possibly listen to him speak of the Dao of alchemy!”

When Zhou heard all of the things people were saying, his face paled. He felt so ashamed that he wanted to hide. However, fury rose within his heart as he stared angrily at Meng Hao. It seemed he still had some fight left.

“You ignorant youth. You’re spouting nonsense! I became a Furnace lord sixty years ago. You....”

“You became a Furnace Lord sixty years ago, and sixty years from now, you will still be a Furnace Lord. As for me, perhaps I’m ignorant, and perhaps I’m young, but I am a Furnace Lord, just like you. In sixty years, you will be forced to prostrate yourself in worship to me! The reason for that is... your Dao of alchemy is flawed!” Meng Hao stood. Without so much as looking at Zhou, he walked out of the valley.

Meng Hao’s words reverberated in the man’s ears like thunder. He raised his hand to point at Meng Hao, but then a tremor ran through his body, and he coughed up a mouthful of blood. “Flawed...? Flawed.....?” Meng Hao’s words echoed about in his mind, causing him to forget to

even offer a retort.

As Meng Hao departed, the eyes of the tens of thousands of apprentice alchemists glowed brightly. They watched him leave, absolutely certain that in the days to come, his name would continue to send shockwaves throughout the East Pill Division. Furthermore, his future lectures would certainly be explosively popular.

Unfortunately, the ways of the world are impossible to fathom. Meng Hao's days of comfort within the Violet Fate Sect were soon to come to an end.

A month after his debate with old man Zhou, Meng Hao sat in his Immortal's Cave. He had just finished with a batch of medicinal pills, and was fantasizing about how he would take advantage of the resources of the Sect to concoct more pills and then accumulate a vast amount of Spirit Stones. It was at this time that a command jade slip arrived. Based on the recommendation of all the Furnace Lords of the East Pill Division, he was to be sent out of the Sect to gain experience.

After being promoted, all Furnace Lords were required to leave the Sect for a period of time to get experience. It was actually a rule, although a flexible one. Generally speaking, alchemists prefer to concoct pills in solitude, and don't like to travel on the outside.

However, the Black Sieve Sect had offered vast compensation in exchange for the Violet Fate Sect to dispatch two Furnace Lords, one to give lectures on the Dao of alchemy, one to concoct special medicinal pills. Such an arrangement was common within the great Sects and Clans.

Even Li Tao, who wasn't a Furnace Lord, had been invited a month before to visit the Li Clan. This was of course because they had purchased his Foundation Establishment Day.

As for Meng Hao, the reason he had been recommended to the Black Sieve Sect in the first place was because of the unorthodox nature of his promotion to Furnace Lord.

Of course, there were quite a few people who were just waiting for Meng Hao to make a fool of himself. The pills to be concocted outside for a great

Sect were not ordinary, and every one would require the full skill of a Furnace Lord.

Considering that Meng Hao had bypassed some of the requirements for becoming a Furnace Lord, there really was no way for him to refuse the order.

“The Black Sieve Sect....” Meng Hao’s brow furrowed.

Chapter 245: Back To the Black Sieve Sect

Meng Hao didn't really want to go, but the command jade slip had been issued, and he had no good reason to refuse. Furthermore... he owed a lot of medicinal pills to the Sect. All of his debts were in the official records, and although he didn't have to pay up immediately, sooner or later, he would.

If he didn't, then his access to medicinal plants would be restricted. Therefore, this trip outside the Sect would serve more than one purpose. Not only would he be able to gain experience, but he would could reduce some of his debt to the Sect.

"For Fang Mu, a trip to the Black Sieve Sect... is a great opportunity!" Determination glittered in Meng Hao's eyes. His decision to go to the Black Sieve Sect having been made, the image of Elder Sister Xu appeared in his mind.

He also thought of Han Bei, as well as Zhou Jie, and all of the events which had occurred that year connected to the Black Sieve Sect. ¹

"This time, I will be traveling in the Southern Domain as a Furnace Lord of the Violet Fate Sect." Chuckling, Meng Hao flicked his sleeve to gather together the various items he would take with him. Then, jade slip in hand, he left his Immortal's Cave.

Several days later.

"Grandmaster Zhou, Grandmaster Fang, this is a Black Sieve Fruit, which we grow here in the Black Sieve Sect. The flavor is as delectable as fine wine, and they are usually only given to Sect Elders."

Somewhere outside of the Violet Fate Sect, a massive black airship shot through the air at top speed. It was crewed by several hundred Black Sieve Sect disciples, all of whom had extraordinary Cultivation bases within the Foundation Establishment stage.

There was one disciple of the Core Formation stage, the Alchemy Protector dispatched by the Black Sieve Sect to guard over the Violet Fate

Sect disciples. He sat with them in the center of the airship, smiling, concealing the thoughtfulness which exist in his mind. In front of him was a white-haired old man in a black and purple robe; he seemed to emanate the Dao, and pure transcendence. Next to the old man was a handsome, fair-skinned young man.

The old man's expression was that of indifference mixed with austerity. His Cultivation base was at the late Foundation Establishment stage. This was none other than Furnace Lord Zhou, whom Meng Hao had debated in the valley one month before.

The young man next to him emanated the faint scent of medicinal plants. He looked less like a Cultivator than a scholar. Naturally, this was none other than Meng Hao.

In addition to the Core Formation Cultivator, the Black Sieve Sect had also dispatched a young man who appeared to be a bit over thirty years of age. He wore a long bluish-black robe and seemed to abound in profundity and knowledge. He sat wordlessly off to the side, looking somewhat taciturn. When Meng Hao had caught sight of him for the first time several days ago, he had felt shock in his heart.

This was Zhou Jie!

Dao Child of the Black Sieve Sect!

This was the same person Meng Hao had battled years ago, a battle of the peak of Foundation Establishment! In that battle, Zhou Jie had lost. His open and upright actions had earned Meng Hao's respect, and he had spared his life. ²

Meng Hao hadn't seen him for five years, and now, something about him seemed different. Meng Hao couldn't quite tell what it was, but it left him with a very bizarre feeling.

Such thoughts swirled in his heart, but were not revealed on his face. After hearing the words of the Core Formation Cultivator, Meng Hao was still considering how to respond, when old man Zhou reached out to take one of the Black Sieve Fruits.

“What an extraordinary fruit,” he said coolly. “It would be best used as a medicinal ingredient. I won’t waste it by eating it.” He glanced at Meng Hao.

Meng Hao didn’t say anything. With a smile, he accepted the Black Sieve Fruit and then placed it in his bag of holding. Inwardly, he sighed. How could he possibly have imagined that the Violet Fate Sect would send him out with old man Zhou? Zhou was responsible for giving lectures regarding the Dao of alchemy, whereas he would be in charge of pill concocting.

For the entire time they had been on the airship, Zhou hadn’t given Meng Hao anything but dirty looks. Of course, the people from Black Sieve Sect had picked up on this.

The Core Formation Cultivator had a wide smile on his face, but inwardly had some doubts. “This Furnace Lord Zhou Dekun is famous and deeply qualified. He’s one of the top Furnace Lords, and his frequent visits to the Black Sieve Sect show how much the Violet Fate Sect respects us. However, this Fang Mu.... After asking around, I found that he finagled his way to Furnace Lord half a year ago. He’s really nothing more than a master alchemist.” Of course, the man would never allow any expression onto his face which would indicate he was looking down on Fang Mu. However, he did treat old man Zhou with a higher level of respect. ³

He laughed loudly. “If you’d like, Grandmaster Zhou,” he said, his voice kind, “I can entreat the Sect Leader to provide both of you with even more Black Sieve Fruits.”

Off to the side, Zhou Jie sat taciturnly. He hadn’t said a single word the entire time. In this respect, he was somewhat like Meng Hao, who wasn’t in the mood for conversation. Furthermore, it seemed to please old man Zhou that he was left to handle all the formalities.

The four people sat there, only two engaging in conversation, their expressions cheerful. Old man Zhou seemed very proud of himself. “This time,” he told himself, “I’ll show this pup how formidable I truly am.”

Time passed. The airship traveled quickly, and even made use of several

teleportation portals. A few days later, the Hundred Thousand Mountains of the Black Sieve Sect appeared off in the distance.

Meng Hao had spent most of the time in secluded meditation. No one had dared to interrupt him; the Black Sieve Sect disciples all gave him looks filled with utmost respect.

As for Zhou, his actions were quite the opposite of Meng Hao's. He engaged in bombastic discussions with the Core Formation Cultivator, flagrantly displaying his profound and awe-inspiring understanding of the Dao of alchemy.

Meng Hao didn't mind, nor did he care about the way old man Zhou seemed to loathe him. Despite his loathing, he didn't dare to ridicule Meng Hao like he had before. In fact, his debate with Meng Hao had left him fearful at heart.

This was Meng Hao's first time to appear in front of outsiders as an alchemist. Observing the respect with which others treated him because of his position, he was even more reassured that he had made the right decision in joining the Violet Fate Sect.

Of course, if the people here found out that he was actually Meng Hao, then their killing intent would billow to the heavens. Whenever he heard the stories people told about Meng Hao, he would sigh inwardly.

"As of now, I'm truly a part of the Southern Domain. Five years ago, I was just an outsider." He stood at the bow of the airship, lost in thought, staring off at the Black Sieve Sect, which was slowly growing closer and closer.

The Hundred Thousand Mountains stretched out seemingly without end. Black smoke from the gigantic incense burner rose up into the sky. The Black Sieve Sect seemed to be filled with a mysterious, incredible power.

The Black Sieve Sect disciple's faces emanated a pride that seemed to stem from their bones, birthed by their endless mountains and the smoke which rose to the heavens.

Zhou and the Core Formation Cultivator strolled up, chatting. When

Zhou saw Meng Hao, he snorted. They were fellow Sect members, and whatever ill feelings they had toward each other shouldn't be overtly revealed to outsiders. Therefore, he only snorted, but didn't say anything else, joining Meng Hao to look out at the Black Sieve Sect.

Of course, this wasn't the first time Meng Hao had come to help the Black Sieve Sect. However, the circumstances this time were vastly different. As soon as the airship approached the Hundred Thousand Mountains, the sound of bells filled the air.

Six peals rang out, attracting the attention of hundreds of thousands of Black Sieve Sect disciples. Actually, none of them knew what was happening, but soon, inquiries were made and news began to spread.

The Black Sieve Sect had invited Furnace Lords from the Violet Fate Sect for a visit.

Soon, Meng Hao caught sight of dozens of beams of light flying out from the Black Sieve Sect, followed by hundreds of Conclave disciples.

Among the Conclave disciples was Han Bei. She had a strange expression on her face when she looked at Meng Hao. Meng Hao had made inquiries earlier about Elder Sister Xu, and had discovered that she had already become a Conclave disciple. However, she was not among the group that approached now.

Laughter rang out, followed by a clear, powerful voice from the group of Cultivators in the lead, who were all of the Core Formation stage. One was even of the Nascent Soul stage! "Greetings Grandmaster Zhou and Grandmaster Fang! Welcome to the Black Sieve Sect!"

The Nascent Soul Cultivator was no stranger to Meng Hao. He was none other than... Patriarch Violet Sieve! ⁴

He was also the person who has just spoken!

When enemies meet, eyes will usually turn red, and killing intent will explode out. Instead, Patriarch Violet Sieve's face was filled with a smile. He expressed no arrogance because of his Nascent Soul Cultivation base, but rather utmost respect for the two alchemists.

Meng Hao's expression was solemn. He quickly stepped forward, a respectful look on his face. Almost at the same time, old man Zhou also walked forward. Together, they clasped hands and greeted Patriarch Violet Sieve.

For the Black Sieve Sect to dispatch a Nascent Soul Cultivator to receive them was an extreme honor. As representatives of the Violet Fate Sect, Meng Hao and old man Zhou could certainly not commit a breach of etiquette.

"Grandmaster Zhou," said Patriarch Violet Sieve, "you are one of the highest ranked Furnace Lords. Your rise to Violet Furnace Lord is surely just around the corner. Your esteemed presence in the Black Sieve Sect has added glitter to our humble abode." He laughed heartily, smiling at Zhou, and then turned his attention to Meng Hao. "Grandmaster Fang, you are the youngest of the Furnace Lords of the Violet Fate Sect. Your fame is spreading throughout the Southern Domain, and I've long since heard your name. Seeing you today, I am now assured that you are a hero amongst commoners."

Patriarch Violet Sieve's words were spoken well. Although he inwardly cared more about old man Zhou, he did not show any disregard for Meng Hao. The Core Formation Cultivators who surrounded him clasped hands and saluted Meng Hao and old man Zhou. None of them showed even the slightest trace of arrogance, only utmost courtesy.

After some pleasantries were exchanged, one of the Core Formation Cultivators called over the Conclave disciples and introduced them to Meng Hao and old man Zhou. A slight smile appeared on Meng Hao's face as he nodded to the various disciples one after another.

"My respects, Grandmaster Zhou, Grandmaster Fang!"

"Greetings, Grandmaster Zhou, Grandmaster Fang." Normally, these Conclave disciples would have lofty and proud demeanors in front of outside Cultivators. But today, their expressions were filled with respect. The fame of Furnace Lords was enough to awe anyone.

The title of Grandmaster by which they were called was simply

honorary, of course, as neither of them were true Grandmasters.

Old man Zhou smiled toward the Black Sieve Sect's Conclave disciples. Considering his age, all that was required of him was a slight nod. However, when he noticed that Meng Hao was doing the same, an irritated feeling arose in his heart.

When Han Bei was introduced, Meng Hao looked at her with a smile. He hadn't seen her for five years. If anything, she was more beautiful. Her figure was curvaceous ⁵, her face alluring, and as she stood there, it seemed as if rainbows would lose their color if they neared her. She was uniquely gorgeous.

"Han Bei extends greetings to Grandmaster Zhou and Grandmaster Fang," she said, her voice soft and velvety. Such a voice seemed capable of making the heart itch.

Meng Hao smiled and nodded, and was just about to glance over to the next person, when suddenly, a voice rang out in his mind. It had been a long time since the Demon Sealing Jade had spoken to him.

"Discarnate souls possess the body, desiring to return from the afterlife, a technique of quickening. Demons under the vault of the Heavens shall be incinerated; ashes shall fly. Seal them, and the sun of the seventh month shall be concealed; help them, and the blood of the Demon Sealer can fuse with its will!"

*

1. Han Bei is the beautiful, conniving Conclave disciple who last appeared in Chapter 192. Zhou Jie is the Dao Child whose life Meng Hao spared in the final chapter of book 2, Chapter 204.
2. The battle between Meng Hao and Zhou Jie started in Chapter 202.
3. Zhou Dekun's name in Chinese is 周德坤 zhōu dé kūn – Zhou is a common surname. De means "morals" or "virtue." Kun is one of the Eight Trigrams which represents Earth and has a variety of other meanings.

4. Patriarch Violet Sieve was in charge of the mission to get Ultimate Vexation. He last appeared in Chapter 166.
5. The word I'm translating as curvaceous is kind of cool in Chinese. The characters are very visual: 凹凸

Chapter 246: World Pill Division

“Fellow Daoist Han,” said Meng Hao suddenly, looking Han Bei up and down, “you look somewhat familiar. Have we met before?” Such presumptuous words were actually part of Meng Hao’s plan.

As soon as the words came out of his mouth, all of the Black Sieve Sect Conclave disciples looked at the two of them. Even the Core Formation experts glanced over, their eyes sparkling with interest.

Patriarch Violet Sieve’s interest was also piqued.

Old man Zhou was astonished.

Han Bei’s eyes focused on Meng Hao. “Grandmaster Fang, please forgive me, but, I really don’t remember....” She looked thoughtful, and seemed to have something flickering deep within her eyes. Meng Hao was sure that she was hiding something.

Had he not experienced her craftiness personally in the Black Sieve Sect’s Blessed Land, then he would never have been able to detect it.

“My mistake,” he said with a laugh. “Perhaps it’s just that I wished I had met you before.” Hearing this, the Black Sieve Sect Conclave disciples all smiled.

The Core Formation experts also smiled and shook their heads. Considering their age, they had long since abandoned the pursuit of beautiful women.

Old man Zhou frowned. In his opinion, it didn’t matter if Fang Mu was young, such behavior was really embarrassing for the Sect.

Patriarch Violet Sieve laughed. “Grandmaster Fang Mu, there will be plenty of time later for you youngsters to get to know each other. For now, why don’t you follow me as we enter the Sect?”

His face red, Meng Hao clasped hands and bowed to Patriarch Violet Sieve, “I’ve embarrassed myself in front of Senior,” he said.

Han Bei covered her mouth with her hand and blinked.

Meng Hao and old man Zhou entered the Sect, surrounded by the various members of the Black Sieve Sect. It was at this exact moment that suddenly, Patriarch Violet Sieve's expression flickered. He turned to look off into the distance. Everyone else stopped moving and followed suit.

Patriarch Violet Sieve chuckled. "It seems Grandmasters Li and Chen from the Golden Frost Sect's World Pill Division arrived half a day early." He waved his arm, and immediately bells tolled another six times within the Black Sieve Sect.

Meng Hao looked off into the distance, and before long, caught sight of a massive airship approaching at top speed. As it neared, a group of people flew off of the deck and down toward them. Two of their number wore long crimson robes, the sleeves of which were embroidered with pill furnaces. They seemed powerful and extraordinary, and both emanated a medicinal aroma.

"Hmph!" snorted Zhou Dekun, who stood next to Meng Hao. "I never imagined the Black Sieve Sect would also invite Grandmaster Eternal Mountain's World Pill Division."

Meng Hao looked at the two middle-aged master alchemists from Eternal Mountain's World Pill Division. They smiled as they approached.

Meng Hao turned to Zhou Dekun and asked, "When other Sects extend invitations to alchemists, do disciples of the other Grandmasters of the Dao of alchemy always show up?"

"Sometimes, but not often," replied Zhou Dekun. He had the mind to ignore Meng Hao. However, they were two fellow Sect members on the outside. Now that there were two people from Eternal Mountain's World Pill Division present, it would be difficult to avoid friction regarding the Dao of alchemy.

Not wanting to make the following days in the Black Sieve Sect unstable, Zhou Dekun added, "It seems the Black Sieve Sect really wants to improve their Dao of alchemy, and as such, has also invited the World Pill Division." Zhou Dekun frowned. By the time he finished speaking, Patriarch Violet Sieve and the others had already clustered politely around

the two World Pill Division master alchemists to lead them into the Sect.

Almost as soon as they neared, one of the scarlet-robed alchemists from the World Pill Division, a tall, sturdy man with a powerful, extraordinary air, began to speak. "Fellow Daoist Zhou is also here? I seem to remember his mighty words from years ago, when he spoke of becoming a Violet Furnace Lord. Sixty years have passed already, Fellow Daoist Zhou, have you achieved your goal yet?" His gaze fell like lightning upon Zhou Dekun and Meng Hao.

"So, it's Fellow Daoist Li," said Zhou Dekun with a snort. The man's words had touched directly on a painful matter in his heart, and he couldn't help but snidely remark, "I haven't seen you for years, and yet somehow your breath has gotten worse."

The second of the two alchemists was somewhat skinny, and had a mustache shaped like the character 八. He looked at Meng Hao and gave a false smile. "This must be Grandmaster Fang Mu, the East Pill Division alchemist who people say finagled his way to becoming a Furnace Lord. Haha! Sir, I've been looking forward to meeting the famous Brother Fang for some time! Your name resounds like thunder in the ears of those who cultivate the Dao of alchemy. They say you're a master alchemist who wears the clothing of a Furnace Lord!"

The instant these two alchemists from Eternal Mountain's World Pill Division appeared, they spoke words filled with ill intentions. Their diametrical opposition to the East Pill Division alchemists was obvious.

The people from the Black Sieve Sect seemed to take all of this in stride. The Dao of alchemy of the East Pill Division was the most recognized throughout the Southern Domain, and their reputation was the most illustrious. The World Pill Division had been created by Grandmaster Eternal Mountain of the Golden Frost Sect. Although Eternal Mountain showed respect for Grandmaster Pill Demon, his disciples and followers grew more aggressive by the day. They refused to acknowledge the glory of the East Pill Division, and whenever the two sides met, regardless of the occasion, sparks would fly.

Meng Hao looked at the man named Chen, who had just spoken in such a sarcastic tone. “Who might you be?” he asked, his brow furrowed.

“Sir, I am Chen Jiaxi ¹, scarlet-robed master alchemist of the World Pill Division!” He smiled broadly as he looked at Meng Hao, his heart filled with envy because of Meng Hao’s status as a Furnace Lord. In his opinion, his own skill in the Dao of alchemy might not earn him the rank of Violet Furnace Lord were he in the East Pill Division, but he would definitely rank among the highest of the Furnace Lords.

Actually, many people in the World Pill Division entertained similar thoughts. After all... the alchemists of the World Pill Division were famous in the Southern Domain, but did not receive the same level of acknowledgement that the East Pill Division did. They were just a little bit lower, which of course fueled their disdain.

“You mean, you’ve heard of me?” asked Meng Hao, sounding astonished. No onlooker would find anything about his expression to be out of the ordinary. However, Zhou Dekun was well aware of the vicious language Meng Hao was capable of, and his heart began to thump. He knew that Meng Hao’s words were by no means a retreat.

Chen Jiaxi laughed at Meng Hao’s stunned expression, and his eyes filled with scorn. “How could any Cultivator of the Dao of alchemy not have heard of Alchemist Fang’s rise to Furnace Lord? In fact, I’d like to ask, how does it feel to wear the clothing of a Furnace Lord?”

It was as if a lightbulb went off over Meng Hao’s head. He laughed, and said, “Oh, I get it. You know me because I’m a Furnace Lord of the East Pill Division. My words and deeds are common knowledge among all Cultivators of the Dao of alchemy. Therefore, my name reverberates like thunder in your ears. However, you are a simple scarlet-robed disciple of the World Pill Division who I’ve never even heard of. I guess you must have come today because you wanted to get to know me!”

“You!!” cried Chen Jiaxi, his eyes exploding with a cold glow. In his opinion, such words were a direct insult. Not only did they proclaim that his reputation was so unremarkable that his opponent had never heard of

him, they also implied that the reputation of someone who had finagled his way to Furnace Lord rang like thunder in his ears.

Not only were the flames of Chen Jiayi's anger stoked by Meng Hao's words, the man next to him, Li Yiming, glared at Meng Hao icily. "How sharp-tongued!" he said.

Seeing that the altercation was about to intensify, Patriarch Violet Sieve cleared his throat and stepped between the two parties, followed by other Core Formation experts. With smiles on their faces, they led the way into the Hundred Thousand Mountains.

The arguing ceased immediately. Now that they were in the Black Sieve Sect, both the East Pill Division and the World Pill Division must give face. After all, they had been invited here, and the Black Sieve Sect wouldn't want a violent conflict to erupt the moment their guests entered the Sect.

Zhou Dekun surreptitiously glanced at Meng Hao. Although he had a low opinion of him, he was secretly pleased. Meng Hao's words just now had left him feeling quite satisfied.

They flew along, eventually reaching the Hundred Mountains, and a large temple which spread out beneath a green mountain peak. Here, the Black Sieve Sect had arranged a banquet to welcome the East Pill Division and Mountain Pill Division.

Patriarch Violet Sieve made no more appearances. The mere fact that he had arrived to escort the master alchemists from the two Division was evidence of the respect offered by the Black Sieve Sect.

Most of the Sect's Conclave disciples attended the banquet. Meng Hao saw Zhou Jie and Han Bei. However, he didn't see Elder Sister Xu, which made him a bit worried, although he didn't show it on his face.

Zhou Dekun engaged in lively conversation with the crowds of people. Li and Chen, the scarlet-robed master alchemists of the World Pill Division seemed very comfortable in such a setting, and quickly became a center of attention.

Also in attendance were six Core Formation Cultivators, who all sat

together but interacted courteously with everyone present. The Black Sieve Sect really seemed to have gone all out in their attempts to welcome the alchemists from the two Sects.

The banquet wound to an end as night fell. As everyone began to depart, Meng Hao was escorted to an area the Hundred Mountains called the Black Welcoming Mountains. On the peak of one of the mountains was a luxurious residence which was surrounded by various restrictive spells that made it extremely safe.

Considering Meng Hao came as a representative of the Violet Fate Sect, the Black Sieve Sect could not possibly allow any harm to come to him. This of course was a matter of face and relationship between two great Sects.

Late in the night, Meng Hao sat cross-legged within the building, breathing deeply. After meditating for some time, his body began to emanate a white Qi as he dissolved the alcohol from the beverages he had consumed during the banquet. Before consuming them, he had examined the alcohol using his skill with plants and vegetation, and knew that it was safe.

Some time passed, and then Meng Hao's eyes opened. They glowed with a brilliant light.

"Han Bei is incredibly intelligent. Perhaps I shouldn't have openly addressed her earlier. What is she hiding?" He thought about the matter for some time, but couldn't come up with any theories. "I didn't see Elder Sister Xu today, I wonder how she is...? And what about Zhou Jie? Something seems very off about him. He seems different than before...." After more thought, his eyes began to flicker. "What exactly did the Demon Sealing Jade mean...." He closed his eyes and continued to meditate.

*

1. Chen Jiayi's name in Chinese is 陈嘉喜 chén jiā xǐ – Chen is a common surname. Jia means "good," "splendid," and a variety of similar words. Xi means "happiness".

Chapter 247: Kill Me!

Early the next morning, the dawn sun peeked out and sunlight fell upon Black Welcoming Peak. The mountain was verdant and green, and while there were no singing birds or fragrant flowers, Meng Hao's spirits were lifted as he gazed out of the second story balcony at the lush vegetation of the surrounding mountain range.

The undulating mountains, covered with emerald green vegetation, were illuminated by brilliant sunlight. The glow fell upon Meng Hao's black robe, causing its violet aura to grow stronger. Anyone who looked at it would have a hard time deciding if it were black or violet.

The mountain breeze lifted up his long hair, making it seem as if Meng Hao himself wished to float away with the wind. As he stared off into the distance, a violet light gleamed within his eye.

This was the manifestation of Violet Qi from the East, which had also turned his six Dao Pillars a violet hue.

After a long moment passed, Meng Hao took in a deep breath, then left the residence. As he began to walk down the mountain path which threaded through the Black Welcoming Mountains, he encountered Black Sieve Sect disciples who immediately saluted with clasped hands, their faces filled with politeness, yet maintaining some of the pride they felt as members of the Black Sieve Sect. Obviously, word had been spread throughout the Sect regarding how to treat the visitors.

Meng Hao smiled, returning the salute, and continuing on his way.

He soon emerged from the Black Welcoming Mountains and found himself in the middle of the Hundred Mountains. This was an area restricted to Conclave disciples.

Looking around at all the Black Sieve Sect disciples and buildings, and the enormous incense burner up above, Meng Hao sighed inwardly. Before joining the Violet Fate Sect, he could never have imagined that one day he would be able to stroll about the Black Sieve Sect in such a leisurely fashion.

“It’s a good thing the meat jelly shed its skin a long time ago. If that happened now, my identity would be revealed immediately.” He walked among the buildings, eventually coming to a halt at the edge of a public square. There, he could see dozens Black Sieve Sect disciples sitting cross-legged, Han Bei included.

An old man was in the midst of giving a sermon, explaining various scriptures regarding Black Sieve Sect magical techniques. Meng Hao had seen this man before; he was one of the Core Formation Cultivators who had received him yesterday along with Patriarch Violet Sieve.

The old man’s voice rang out coolly: “The magic of the Black Sieve Sect can be divided into the will of the Black Underworld, and the teaching of the Sieve of Heavens. The Underworld represents the spirits of the nine earths. The Sieve represents the will of the nine heavens. Therefore, in the Black Sieve Sect, Underworld magic is used to kill, and the will of the Heavens is divine. You must bear these sacred teachings in mind as you practice your cultivation. In the future, your path will lead to the Heavens.” It was at this point that he caught sight of Meng Hao.

He nodded slightly, obviously aware of who Meng Hao was. He didn’t say anything, but instead looked over his audience. Eventually his gaze came to rest on Han Bei. He gave her a meaningful look, and she sighed inwardly, then rose and walked over to Meng Hao.

The old man’s expression remained the same as he continued to discuss the Sect scriptures. He would never have allowed any other outsider to hear such discussions of Sect matters, but considering Meng Hao’s status, it wouldn’t be appropriate to drive him away. Therefore, he asked Han Bei to lead him away.

Han Bei actually did not want to accept this assignment, but she really had no way to refuse. Without any trace of her feelings showing, she arrived at Meng Hao’s side. A beautiful smile blossomed onto her face.

“Grandmaster Fang, you’re such an early riser! Why don’t you accompany me? I’ll show you some of the sights around the Sect.” She was as beautiful as a flower, her voice soft and entrancing.

Meng Hao was well aware that it wasn't very appropriate for him to stay and listen to the Sect sermons. He nodded pleasantly at Han Bei and then said, "To be accompanied by such a stunning flower would be my honor."

The two of them strolled off.

When they were some distance away from the square, Han Bei smiled and said, "Grandmaster Fang, you are truly refined and poetic. I don't deserve to be referred to as a flower." Her eyes sparkled, and her flowing, blue silk garment wrapped around her in a way that truly made her look like a flower.

Han Bei was inherently beautiful, her smile dazzling. She might be a flower, but to Meng Hao, she was a rose, covered with poisoned thorns. He would never forget the softness with which she had uttered the words "Xie, dear" in the Black Sieve Sect's Blessed Land.¹

In response to her words, Meng Hao laughed a bit, but didn't respond. Instead, he just looked her up and down.

"Grandmaster Fang, don't tell me you're still thinking about whatever place it was that you wished you had seen me before?" She laughed lightly, but deep within her eyes, Meng Hao could see that she harbored a measure of anxiety. She didn't think Meng Hao could tell, but considering how well he knew her, he noticed it with a single glance.

Meng Hao's mind instantly spun into action. He knew that Han Bei was not the type of woman to get nervous easily. He thought back to all the times he had seen her before.

"I've embarrassed myself in front of you, Fellow Daoist Han," he said. "It's just that, I really am interested in you." He looked at her, allowing a glow of interest to shine in his eyes.

When Han Bei saw this, her heart instantly seized. From the moment Meng Hao had entered the Sect, an uneasy feeling had overtaken her. Now, her anxiety was growing stronger. However, her skill in scheming ran deep, and she did her best to hide her feelings. She kept her brow smooth, and covered her face with a smile.

Continuing to stroll along, she responded, “Grandmaster Fang, I’m truly honored by your words. However, I truly don’t understand. What exactly about me interests you?” She looked at him, blinking.

“The surname Han is a special one,” said Meng Hao slowly, looking at the rising sun off in the distance.

Hearing this, Han Bei’s expression didn’t change. She smiled and replied, “How is it special?”

“It’s special because it’s one of the Nine Great Families.” His expression was the same as usual, but his words caused Han Bei to frown and sigh. Meng Hao knew that these actions were simply a means to cover up her true reaction.

His heart trembled, and more than ever he got the feeling that something fishy was going on.

“You’re right,” said Han Bei, looking at him. “My ancestors were among the Nine Great Families.”

They came to a stop outside a stretch of emerald-green mountain forest. The wind blew softly, causing the leaves to rustle. Off in the distance, the sound of running water could be heard. The sounds of nature merged together into something similar to music.

Surrounded by the beauty, Meng Hao said nothing. He gazed at Han Bei, and she returned his look.

After a long moment, he laughed, turning his head to look at the green forest. He strolled over to where a mountain stream ambled on toward the east. He looked down into the stream, where fish flitted above the smooth stones of the stream bed. A thoughtful expression appeared in his eyes.

“Something is unusual about Han Bei,” he thought. “How come she’s so nervous around me? It can’t have anything to do with Fang Mu, and she doesn’t know that I’m Meng Hao. In that case... it must have to do with the East Pill Division!”

Han Bei stood next to him, her expression the same as ever. Enough time passed for an incense stick to burn, whereupon she suddenly slapped

her bag of holding. A glowing jade slip appeared. After glancing at it for a moment, she gave Meng Hao a slight curtsy.

“This place is secluded and quiet, Grandmaster Fang. If you wish, you can stay here a while. Unfortunately, there are some matters I have to attend to, and I don’t wish to disturb your ruminations. This jade slip contains a map of the Black Sieve Sect, please feel free to use it to go enjoy some of the scenery. I’ll take my leave now.” She handed him the jade slip, then turned lithely and made to leave.

As she did, Meng Hao casually said, “One of your friends in the East Pill Division wished me to pass on greetings to you. As for that matter....” His words seemed to be filled with meaning, and yet were ambiguous and equivocal. Really, any meaning could be derived from them.

However, as soon as Han Bei heard them, her heart began to pound. Her back was turned to Meng Hao, so she allowed her eyes to narrow. However, her posture betrayed no clue regarding her thoughts. She slowly turned her head, and when she did, her face was covered with a look of surprise.

“Grandmaster Fang, I’m not really sure what you mean,” she said, blinking. Her expression filled with confusion, as if she were trying very hard to figure out which friend Meng Hao was referring to.

If she had not manifested such an expression, Meng Hao would have been left guessing. But such a reaction solidified his speculations.

There was definitely something going on with Han Bei.

Based on his understanding of her, he knew that were she not harboring some deep anxiety, she would take advantage of such a topic of conversation to gather more information from him. Instead, she instantly displayed an expression of surprise.

He laughed. “I see. I clearly mistook you for someone else.” He said nothing further. Currently, he wasn’t sure exactly what secret Han Bei was keeping. That would take further deliberation. However, he also knew that speaking too much could lead to slip-ups. Then, Han Bei might come to the conclusion that she was being played, and that could lead to

unnecessary complications.

Hearing Meng Hao's words, Han Bei gave him a vague smile. Saying no more, she gave another curtsy, then turned and left. It wasn't until she was very far away, that her face grew pale and went tight with anxiety.

"East Pill Division..." she murmured as she sped off into the distance.

Meng Hao watched her disappear, and his eyes glowed with thoughtfulness.

Han Bei had been acting strangely from the moment he had entered the Black Sieve Sect. She didn't want anyone to notice her nervousness, but Meng Hao could tell that he had just managed to charge directly into whatever secret she was harboring deep in her heart.

After much thought, though, he wasn't able to deduce what relationship Han Bei could possibly have with the East Pill Division. He looked down at the jade slip she had given him. He scanned it with Spiritual Sense, and a map of the various mountains of the Black Sieve Sect appeared in his mind.

Some areas were marked with magical symbols indicating that they were prohibited. After a while, Meng Hao lifted his head and walked off.

He strolled alone through the Black Sieve Sect until about midday. Off in the distance, he could see Black Welcoming Peak, and was just about to return when suddenly his eyes narrowed. He turned and looked off into the distance.

In that exact instant, a shrill scream shattered the peace and quiet within the Black Sieve Sect. At the foot of a distant mountain, roaring could be heard. The ground trembled and a crazed Cultivator flew forward, his hair whipping around his head.

"Kill me! Kill me!" he bellowed, his voice shaking the surrounding land. As he flew forward, multiple beams of light flew up into the air and shot toward him.

Meng Hao stared with narrowed eyes, because he recognized this Cultivator. It was none other than Black Sieve Sect Dao Child Zhou Jie!

1. In Chapter 163, Han Bei called Xie Jie her “dear,” and then moments later ruthlessly killed him.

Chapter 248: The Origin of Time!

The incoming figures flew with incredible speed, but Zhou Jie was even faster. His howls echoed up as he transformed into a beam of light that sped through the air.

He wasn't far from Meng Hao, and soon grew even nearer. Meng Hao could clearly see Zhou Jie's insanity and confusion. His eyes were bloodshot and filled with pain.

It seemed as if he truly wished to die!

"Kill me!!" he screamed. It was at this point that the other Black Sieve Sect people arrived. There were five of them, all Core Formation Cultivators. Their hands flickered in incantation gestures, and suddenly the ground around Zhou Jie sank down. A booming sound rippled out, and Zhou Jie seemed to be suddenly suppressed. His face warped, and the frenzied agony in his eyes reached a pinnacle of intensity.

A massive boom exploded out from Zhou Jie's body, sending the five Core Formation Cultivators tumbling backward several paces, their faces pale and blood spewing from their mouths.

Seeing all this, Meng Hao's mind was reeling, and he had trouble believing it all was real. Zhou Jie was of the great circle of Foundation Establishment, halfway to Core Formation. However, his attack just now caused five early Core Formation stage Cultivators to spit up blood. Meng Hao gasped at the sight of it.

Suddenly, Zhou Jie's Cultivation base started to climb. Explosive power emanated out, and his howls reached up to the heavens.

The voice of the Demon Sealing jade suddenly rose up in Meng Hao's mind, although it was a bit different from earlier when he had seen Han Bei for the first time. "Discarnate souls possess the body, returned from the afterlife, a quickening. Intentional or not, the soul has already been harmed."

Suddenly, a person appeared next to the crazed Zhou Jie. He lifted his

hand and pressed down onto Zhou Jie's shoulder. Zhou Jie's body trembled, and his power began to dissipate. The insanity seeped out of his eyes, and the confusion disappeared. The only thing that remained was a strange pain.

His body trembled. The pain in his eyes seemed to contain immeasurable torment. This was a Dao Child who had won Meng Hao's respect all those years ago. He seemed clearheaded now, but he still uttered two words. "Kill me...."

Most people are not capable of truly seeking death; the desire to live is ever-present. The only people who will truly seek death are... those whose lives are a living hell!

After speaking, Zhou Jie lost consciousness. The figure who had appeared next to him was none other than Patriarch Violet Sieve. His expression was dignified as he grabbed unconscious Zhou Jie and made to leave. Suddenly, he turned his head to look at Meng Hao.

"Grandmaster Fang Mu, we've incurred your ridicule. This kid Zhou Jie became addled while practicing cultivation, and went a bit crazy." He sighed and shook his head. With that, he carried Zhou Jie away, followed by the five Core Formation Cultivators.

Meng Hao stood there silently. Everything that had just happened had left him shaken. The Dao Child from five years ago and the Zhou Jie from right now were completely different. What had happened to cause such an unfortunate change?

He began to think subconsciously about his battle with Zhou Jie that rainy night.

Late morning had arrived. Meng Hao turned and headed back to the Black Welcoming Peak, and his residence there.

He sat down cross-legged, reviewing everything that had just happened with Zhou Jie, as well as the words of the Demon Sealing jade. The bizarre secrets of the Black Sieve Sect seemed to grow even more numerous. A long time passed, and Meng Hao finally shook his head and put the matter aside. He slapped his bag of holding to produce a pill furnace.

He was outside of his Sect, but he still would maintain his custom of concocting pills every day. He tapped the pill furnace, and a roaring could be heard. He produced some earthy fire crystals and prepared to concoct a batch of poison pills.

After becoming a Furnace Lord, poison pills were what he concocted the most often. Based on the various interactions of plants and vegetation, powders or poison pills could be created.

There were countless varieties, each with their own unique characteristics.

Based on the requirements, Meng Hao would produce a medicinal plant and catalyze it. At the moment, he held a Treasure Leaf flower in hand, which wasn't poisonous. Meng Hao catalyzed it until it was almost withered.

By catalyzing it to this point, and then grafting it onto another medicinal plant, he could create traces of undetectable poison.

A purple glow rose up from Meng Hao's palm, the power of catalysis. The Treasure Leaf flower began to sway and grow. It was at this point, that a tremor suddenly ran through Meng Hao; his eyes went wide and began to shine. He began to breathe heavily, and in his mind, thoughts flashed about like lightning. He'd just had an idea.

It was an idea related to Zhou Jie, Han Bei and the East Pill Division!

As soon as the idea flashed into his head, great waves seemed to seethe within his mind. His concentration was broken, and his spiritual power grew unstable. The precious Treasure Leaf flower in his hand suddenly began to collapse.

At the moment, Meng Hao didn't care about how valuable the Treasure Leaf flower was. His breathing was agitated and his eyes glittered. He stood up, forgetting about his pill concocting and focusing fully on the idea, which grew and expanded in his mind.

Meng Hao began to mutter to himself. With each statement, his eyes began to shine more and more brightly. "East Pill Division.... Violet Will

Incantation.... The power of catalysis... it causes medicinal plants to grow... speeds up pill concocting.... the Han Clan, one of the Nine Great Families.... Han Bei.... Refining time.... Forging a treasure of Time... something which can transform Time....” By this point, his eyes seemed to be shining as brightly as the sun. He suddenly lifted his head up and gasped.

“The East Pill Division’s Violet Will Incantation is clearly the time-refining skill of the Han Clan!!” Meng Hao slapped his bag of holding to retrieve the time-refining jade page that he had acquired with Han Bei in the ancient Blessed Land.

This wasn’t the first time he had studied the jade page. It recorded information about how to refine Time and forge the Time treasure. Meng Hao strongly desired to possess such a treasure.

However, this was only one jade page of three. The first remained in the cauldron in the Blessed Land, and another had been swallowed by the meat jelly. Meng Hao had the third page, which did contain information on how to refine the time treasure. However, to do so would require several hundred years to build up sufficient Time power. After learning this, Meng Hao had given up.

It would simply take too long; it was impossible for him to forge the treasure that way.

Time passed, and soon it was nighttime. Moonlight covered the land. Meng Hao took a deep breath and began to compose himself. His eyes glowed with an unprecedented light.

“I should have thought of this earlier.... Refining Time, Violet Will catalysis.... They are both essentially the same type of divine ability! Basically, they are both magical techniques that were developed from the same magical source! This third page describes a time-locking technique. The power of one year of Time can be locked in for every ten years. Six hundred years will lock in sixty years of Time. In that case, the power of ten sixty-year cycles could be used to create a lesser version of the Time treasure.” Meng Hao slapped his bag of holding to produce a Spring and

Autumn tree.

“Perhaps the page swallowed by the meat jelly, the second page, or even the first page which is still in the Cauldron in the Blessed Land, contains a record of the East Pill Division’s Violet Will catalysis technique! In order to forge the time treasure, Violet Will catalysis is absolutely necessary!” He looked down at the jade page and the Spring and Autumn tree, his eyes shining.

“There’s only one way to find out for sure!” Without hesitation, Meng Hao caused a violet glow to appear in his hand. A look of concentration filled his face as he employed the full power of the Violet Will Incantation and poured it into the Spring and Autumn tree.

Time passed. Soon two hours had gone by. Meng Hao frowned. The Spring and Autumn tree was like a black hole which relentlessly sucked in all the catalyzing power of the Violet Will Incantation. It didn’t seem to have any effect whatsoever on the Spring and Autumn tree.

Meng Hao muttered to himself and looked around. Finally, he let out a cold harrumph and then produced his Furnace Lord medallion. He pressed it, and a violet shield emerged, surrounding Meng Hao’s residence.

This was a function of the Furnace Lord medallion; it would create a screening shield that could block even Spiritual Sense. In this way, the Furnace Lords couldn’t be spied upon while concocting pills.

It had taken quite a bit of resources for the East Pill Division to develop such an art. To date, no one had ever been able to break it. Furnace Lords didn’t always use it when concocting pills. However, it would last for several hours, during which time it was impenetrable.

If too much time passed, though, it was possible for Spiritual Sense to break through.

With the shield in place, Meng Hao ceased to restrict his Cultivation base. Immediately the full power of his six Perfect Dao Pillars was unleashed.

The shield around him glowed with a gentle warmth, covering

everything with its protection. At the same time, the meat jelly's transformative powers dissipated. Meng Hao exploded with the full power of his Cultivation base.

He knew that he couldn't keep this up for a very long time; he didn't want to cause any complications with his current situation. Therefore, he went all out with his power, employing the peak of the power of Violet Will catalysis.

In the blink of an eye, the Spring and Autumn tree slowly began to grow green. Suddenly, a bud appeared!

Seeing the bud caused Meng Hao's eyes to fill with excitement. The power of his Cultivation base instantly dissipated. He lifted his left hand and performed an incantation. Phantom images appeared, ten seals, which he immediately slapped down onto the Spring and Autumn tree.

These ten sealing incantations were none other than the Time locking magic.

Beneath the power of the sealing, the Spring and Autumn tree trembled, then slowly returned to its normal state. However, Meng Hao could clearly tell that something was different about the tree than from before. It seemed thicker and heavier, and deep inside was just a touch of a sensation that seemed to be the Qi of Time.

"It worked!" His eyes glittered brightly as he put the tree away and dissipated the violet shield emanated by the Furnace Lord medallion.

"Unfortunately, it's not convenient to employ the full power of my Cultivation base. Once I leave the Black Sieve Sect, I can do some more tests and see how many years of time I can add to the Spring and Autumn tree." He took a deep breath to calm his racing heart. He had thought a lot about the Time treasure throughout the years. But when it came to the hundreds of years of refinement that were required, he could only sigh. Now, though, he had a method that seemed to be able to allow him to proceed with creating the time treasure. He was confident that it wouldn't take long for him to do so, and end up with a treasure that contained a full sixty-year cycle of Time.

He wasn't sure exactly what powers such a treasure would have, but he keenly anticipated finding out. He was sure that a treasure forged by either the Han Clan's divine ability or the East Pill Division's Violet Will incantation, would not disappoint!

Chapter 249: Reconciled

“Well, it seems this trip to the Black Sieve Sect was by no means for naught!” Having put away the Spring and Autumn tree, Meng Hao smiled. However, deep in his eyes flickered a bit of doubt.

“There seems to be a deep connection between Han Bei and the East Pill Division. I wonder what secret lies there....” He thought about it for a bit, but then put the matter aside. Early morning light once again filled the sky outside.

“As for Zhou Jie, why did he go crazy? When I reencountered him for the first time earlier, something didn’t seem right... Discarnate souls possessing the body, returned from the afterlife....” Meng Hao sat there lost in thought for a while, before raising his head to look outside.

Moments later, he heard a respectful voice from outside. “Grandmaster Fang, the World Pill Division’s Grandmaster Chen will deliver an alchemy lecture today. Would you like to attend?”

Meng Hao thought about it for a moment. He was curious as to how these alchemists from the World Pill Division understood the Dao of alchemy. He rose to his feet and joined the disciple from the Black Sieve Sect. Together, they descended Black Welcoming Peak.

The location of the alchemy lecture was the fifty-seventh mountain of the Black Sieve Sect. This mountain had no peak; its top had been shorn off to create a massive public square which was filled with rings of seats that could fit tens of thousands of spectators.

By the time Meng Hao arrived, there were already more than twenty thousand Black Sieve Sect Cultivators present. They represented a variety of stages, including Qi Condensation, Foundation Establishment and Core Formation, all seated around a raised dais.

Chen Jiayi and Li Yiming from the World Pill Division sat cross-legged atop the dais, meditating.

Surprisingly, off in the distance were three tables, seated behind one of

which was Patriarch Violet Sieve. Next to him was a beautiful middle-aged woman. Meng Hao recognized her as the same woman who had taken Elder Sister Xu from the Reliance Sect all those years ago.

At the third table was a ruddy-faced old man who sat at his table, his eyes flashing like lightning. It was impossible to fathom the level of his Cultivation base, but it seemed to Meng Hao that he was slightly more powerful than Patriarch Violet Sieve.

To have three Nascent Soul Cultivators present would make this alchemy lecture especially superb.

Seated cross-legged some distance in front of the three tables was Zhou Dekun, who was currently staring grimly at Chen Jiaxi and Li Yiming.

Meng Hao strode over and sat down next to him, his expression the same as ever.

Seemingly ignoring his previous distaste for Meng Hao, Zhou Dekun said, "These two are far too arrogant. They came to visit me yesterday on the pretense of paying their respects. In actuality, their words were filled with haughtiness. Apparently they believe that the World Pill Division has already exceeded the East Pill Division!" He really seemed to hate the two alchemists from the World Pill Division. Furthermore, Meng Hao was a fellow Sect member. There had been friction between them, but now they were in the outside world and had to stick together.

Meng Hao had barely seated himself before Zhou Dekun continued to rant: "The Black Sieve Sect invited alchemists from two other Sects to help train their own alchemists. Instead of having us lecture first, they ask the World Pill Division to speak! It's outrageous!"

"The two of us need to be careful. The World Pill Division clearly has ill intentions. They obviously want to humiliate us. If that happens, then we'll lose a lot of face when we go back to the Sect." Zhou Dekun clenched his jaw and stared fixedly at Chen and Li. "I probably have it a bit better off than you," he continued. "You need to be careful in your pill concocting. Ai... Alright, listen. If you have any problems with your pill concocting in the coming days, come find me immediately. I can answer

any questions you have. I'll do my best to help you get up to speed as quickly as possible."

Meng Hao smiled. There had been friction between the two of them, but the recent days spent together caused him to realize there was no reason to be so irked by the man. He shook his head with a smile. "I don't think I'll make any mistakes, don't worry."

"You... Ai... Fang Mu, we've had our differences. Big or small, it doesn't really matter. Right now, the World Pill Division is trying to provoke us. We are here to represent the East Pill Division!" He looked over at Meng Hao. With a sigh, he slapped his bag of holding to produce a jade slip which he handed over. "I prepared this for you last night. It's a collection of information based on my hundred years of cultivation of the Dao of alchemy. All of my knowledge and experience is collected together here. Take a close look, and we can corroborate and test the information together. I'm sure it will help you improve your skill in the Dao of alchemy."

Meng Hao stared in shock for a moment. He accepted the jade slip and then scanned it with Spiritual Sense. He studied it silently for a long moment. Finally, he looked back up at Zhou Dekun. The information inside was genuine. It contained all the experiences of one of the most senior Furnace Lords of the Violet Fate Sect. The information therein was incredibly valuable.

After examining the jade slip, Meng Hao knew that he had been a bit rash before. Any Furnace Lord deserved respect, and could be learned from. Zhou Dekun's way of thinking was a bit rigid, but his detailed understanding of the Dao of alchemy had reached the pinnacle.

Such attention to detail would affect the success rate of pill concoction. Meng Hao might be somewhat more talented than Zhou Dekun in the Dao of alchemy, and have a more profound understanding. However, his success rate in pill concoction was only around three or four batches out of ten.

From the jade slip, though, Meng Hao could see that Zhou Dekun's

success rate was around eight batches out of ten.

“Many thanks, Grandmaster Zhou!” said Meng Hao, his expression serious as he clasped hands and bowed deeply to Zhou Dekun. This jade slip would be of no small help to him.

“There’s no need for that,” said Zhou Dekun. His expression, however, revealed how pleased he was. In his mind, he thought, “This kid might have finagled his way to being a Furnace Lord, but he doesn’t seem that bad. When I get back to the Sect, I’ll have to discuss things with the other Furnace Lords and see if I can improve his reputation.” He cleared his throat, and then sighed and finally brought up something that had puzzled him endlessly, “For the past few days, I’ve been thinking about what you said in the valley that day. Actually, some of it does make sense.... Also, I wanted to ask you something. I really was sure that the plant I was holding was a Seven Leaf clove. I really didn’t think I could have made a mistake. But, I know that the leaves should glow with seven colors at dusk. I just....”

Meng Hao gave an embarrassed grin. With a slight cough, he changed the subject.

If Meng Hao didn’t seem willing to talk about it, then Zhou Dekun wouldn’t press the subject. However, given his skill in the Dao of alchemy, he had some theories already. It seemed the relationship between the two of them was on the repair, and he didn’t intend to cause any further problems. They began to discuss the Dao of alchemy, and both were benefiting. In fact, when the alchemy lecture started, they didn’t pay hardly any attention to it. As the voices of Chen and Li rang out from the dais, they would frequently be filled with displeasure as the two men glared down at Meng Hao and Zhou Dekun.

Inwardly, Chen and Li laughed coldly at the disregard shown by the East Pill Division. However, they weren’t in a position to say anything openly. Meng Hao and Zhou Dekun continued their discussion, and appeared to be benefiting more and more as the time went on.

Zhou Dekun’s eyes gradually began to fill with admiration. Being able to

calmly state their differences in opinion regarding the Dao of alchemy caused him to gradually reach new enlightenment.

As for Meng Hao, he realized that his own grasp of some of the finer details was simply insufficient. After getting advice from Zhou Dekun on the matter, he could tell that he was making improvements.

One old man, one youth, discussing matters passionately. Eventually, Zhou Dekun slapped his hand down onto the table and gasped in admiration. The action seemed a bit affected, causing Meng Hao to laugh. He decided that it was time for him to make a scene as well, so he also slammed his palm down onto the table and let out a gasp of admiration.

This instantly caused Chen and Li to exchange a cold look. Then, cold smiles broke out on their faces. Actually, they had long since decided to use this visit to the Black Sieve Sect as an opportunity to intimidate and shame the East Pill Division.

They didn't plan to do so by means of the alchemy lectures, but rather the pill concocting. In this way, word would spread throughout the Southern Domain, and the two of them would immediately rise to prominence and gain sterling reputations.

Therefore, they held their tongues. Their alchemy lecture went on for two days, and not a single person left. However, throughout the course of the lecture, the spectators gradually divided into two groups. More and more people began to cluster around Meng Hao and Zhou Dekun to listen in on their discussion. They listened in entranced, understanding the majority, but not all, of the things which were being said.

This had been Zhou Dekun's intention all along, so he was quite pleased.

Chen Jiayi's eyes grew darker. Finally, he finished his lecture, then turned to glare coldly at Zhou Dekun and Meng Hao. His voice grim, he said, "You two have been talking for two days. Well, now it's time for the East Pill Division's lecture. I'm very interested to hear your understanding of the Dao of alchemy!"

Next to him, Li Yiming's face was filled with displeasure. With a cold

laugh, he said, "That's right. The East Pill Division occupies the pinnacle of the Dao of alchemy in the Southern Domain. I'm very curious about your honored Sect's understanding of the Dao of alchemy. What exactly is so amazing about it?"

Meng Hao frowned slightly. At first, he and Zhou Dekun had really been exchanging important knowledge about the Dao of alchemy. The majority of the time, though, they had mostly been putting on a show. As such, he had been able to listen to some of the World Pill Division's understanding of the Dao of alchemy. They had some truly unique perspectives, many of which seemed reasonable.

Zhou Dekun gave a cold snort as he stood and headed up to the dais. As for him, he had also noticed some of the special areas from the World Pill Division's lecture. How could he not have picked up on some of the uniqueness of their understanding? As the assigned lecturer during this trip to the Black Sieve Sect, he would not shrink back. He felt as if his knowledge had been honed by his chat with Meng Hao. Now he would do anything to avoid making any slip-ups.

Chen and Li left the dais, and Zhou Dekun stood there, his heart filled with determination. His current plan was to use his command of all the various explicit details to finagle his way through the first part of the lecture.

"In the great path of the Dao of alchemy, special attention must be focused on the variations of plants and vegetation, which must be committed to the heart. These things form Ultimate Truth! As such, the Dao of alchemy is eternal! Fellow Daoists, today, I, Zhou Dekun, shall elaborate upon the third realm of the plant and vegetation variations." Zhou Dekun clearly wanted to drag things out as much as possible to give himself time to think.

However before he could continue, a cold laugh rang out from Chen Jiayi.

"This is the first time I've heard of such a thing," he said. "Grandmaster Zhou, you claim that the Dao of alchemy means to commit plants and

vegetation to heart, which leads to Ultimate Truth. Therefore, I would like to ask you, what is this Ultimate Truth to which you refer?" He slapped his palm down onto the table. The sound echoed out, bolstered by his Cultivation base, to form an overbearing aura. He stared at Zhou Dekun.

Strange looks appeared on the faces of the surrounding Cultivators. Everything was quiet. Patriarch Violet Sieve and the other Nascent Soul Patriarchs did nothing to interfere. The conflicting views of the East Pill Division and the World Pill division had come to a head.

Chapter 250: Giving Birth to the Transformations of the Sun and Moon

Meng Hao frowned. He and Zhou Dekun might not like the World Pill Division very much, but just now, they had merely engaged in a discussion during their lecture. They hadn't done anything particularly aggressive.

Chen Jiayi's words just now were far too direct, almost like the stab of a sword.

The World Pill Division had chosen to openly assault Zhou Dekun, to shame not just him, but the entire East Pill Division. They clearly wanted to improve their prestige by destroying Zhou Dekun and Meng Hao's.

If Meng Hao and Zhou Dekun came out on the bottom today, it was easy to imagine how quickly the news would spread throughout the Southern Domain. The East Pill Division would suffer an incredible loss of face, and Meng Hao and Zhou Dekun would become laughingstocks.

For an alchemist, reputation was of utmost importance.

This was obviously exactly what Zhou Dekun was thinking about. His face was grave as he looked down from the dais at the proud Chen Jiayi.

Chen Jiayi glared right back at him. He had been waiting for this day for a long time. Based on his skill in the Dao of alchemy, he could be considered a Chosen in the World Pill Division. Furthermore, in terms of debating, there were few within the Sect who could outmatch him.

Days before, when he'd learned that the Black Sieve Sect had extended invitations to both the East Pill Division and the World Pill Division, he had immediately realized that it was an excellent opportunity.

At that time, he had decided to go to any length to take advantage of this opportunity to elevate himself.... As an alchemist, there was no better method to rise to prominence than humiliating a Furnace Lord of the East Pill Division.

The mere thought of it made him incredibly excited. As he stared at

Zhou Dekun, what he saw was not a Cultivator, but a stepping stone to fame.

“After I crush this old fogey and that punk kid from the East Pill Division,” he thought, “the name of Chen Jiaxi will rise to fame both within the Sect and without!”

Standing next to Chen Jiaxi was Li Yiming, who harbored exactly the same idea.

Zhou Dekun looked away from them and began to continue his lecture. “There are three realms of plants and vegetation. The first contains one hundred thousand medicinal plants. The second....” Before he could continue, Chen Jiaxi laughed uproariously. It echoed out gratingly.

He slammed his palm down onto the table and stood up. “Grandmaster Zhou Dekun, Furnace Lord of the East Pill Division, don’t tell me you deny other Fellow Daoists the right to question or doubt the content of your lecture? Are you scared, or simply spouting nonsense? Or... could it be that you’re trying to hoodwink the Fellow Daoists from the Black Sieve Sect?” His words were filled with sarcasm, and the sneer on his face was impossible to ignore. Complacency filled his heart; in his mind, he had already won!

Zhou Dekun angrily spun to face Chen Jiaxi. At this point, there was no way he could pretend to not have heard the words which were blatantly directed, not at him, but at the East Pill Division. Even if the attack was complete nonsense, he had no choice but to address it openly.

Seeing Zhou Dekun’s reaction filled Chen Jiaxi with confidence. Before coming to the Black Sieve Sect, his inquiries had revealed that Zhou Dekun would be coming. The man was quite famous, but Chen Jiaxi’s thorough investigation left him confident that he could defeat him in terms of understanding of the Dao of alchemy.

The Black Sieve Sect disciples in the square observed silently, but seemed to be getting excited. Many present were Conclave disciples, including Han Bei, who watched on with a smile as the conflict between the East Pill Division and the World Pill division intensified.

The three Nascent Soul Patriarchs sat there with eyes closed, apparently meditating. They did not interfere. Apparently they were more than happy at the scene which was unfolding.

“Grandmaster Zhou, glowering at me is useless,” said Chen Jiaxi coolly. “You still haven’t explained exactly what you mean by Ultimate Truth.” His voice seemed completely normal. However, his eyes were filled with ridicule, which made Zhou Dekun even more furious.

“Truth is represented by rules,” he replied, one word at a time. “Regardless of any other countless permutations, rules will always exist in your heart. Utilizing the unchangeableness of rules makes it possible to catalyze the ten thousand medicinal plants. Furthermore, verifying the Truth of the Dao of alchemy makes it possible to beget pill formulas. With enlightenment, one can sense the vast length of that which we call the path of alchemy. Continued exploration is the true goal!”

Chen Jiaxi stared in shock at his words. He had never imagined that Zhou Dekun would be able to respond in such a way. Actually, before meeting Meng Hao, Zhou Dekun wouldn’t have been able to. However, their discussion just now had contained both verification of his previous understandings, and also new enlightenment. Chen Jiaxi and Li Yiming both frowned. The surrounding Cultivators also seemed to have gained new enlightenment.

“Grandmaster Zhou, I really can’t agree with your explanation,” said Chen Jiaxia, his eyes gleaming. As of this moment, he no longer looked down on Zhou Dekun, but actually took him seriously. “If the self is unchangeable,” he said slowly, “then where do transformations come from?! The self is like a river. If the river does not flow, it will die. Moving water ensures the never-ending flow of the river; similarly, a changeable self ensures continued existence!” His words caused Zhou Dekun’s face to flicker. He was about to respond when Chen Jiaxi flicked his sleeve and interrupted: “Can a tree remain motionless amidst the wind? The only tree that doesn’t... is the tree that exists in a painting! The movement of the tree is evidence of the blowing wind, and of its own very existence!”

“Grandmaster Zhou, you claim that the self is unchangeable. How

laughable! Perhaps this is why you are still not a Violet Furnace Lord. Your understanding of the Dao of alchemy makes it clear that you are like a flower in love with its own fragrance! You're simply fishing for fame and compliments! The only place you will become of a Violet Furnace Lord is in a fairytale!"

The increasingly vicious words caused Zhou Dekun to tremble. He pointed at the man and said, "You... You...."

"I what? Don't tell me you're at a loss for words? A motionless river is nothing but dead water. An unmoving tree can exist only in a painting. Grandmaster Zhou, you obviously exist in a world of dead water, belittling the floating clouds. Are you, or are you not... fishing for fame and compliments!? You live in a painting, ignoring Heaven and Earth, blithe to the brilliance of the world outside. I say, you are a flower in love with its own fragrance. Am I wrong?" Chen Jiaxi's voice continued to grow louder. By the time he reached the end of his tirade, Zhou Dekun's face was pale, and his eyes seemed on the verge of bursting forth with flame. It was obvious to him that his opponent was twisting his words, and yet, the words somehow also seemed reasonable. His mind filled with words of response, but he just couldn't get them out of his mouth.

"Nonsense!" he cried furiously. Hearing this, Meng Hao sighed inwardly.

"Nonsense?" said Chen Jiaxi. "Very well. Let me explain to you what Truth really is! Consider the Yin (阴) and the Yang (阳), the moon (月) and the sun (日). In the great world of alchemy, the boundless sun is the Yang, which encompasses everything that melts and burns. This is the pill furnace! The bright moon is the changeable Yin, which is the pill formula! This is Truth! Grandmaster Zhou, if you really stand at the pinnacle of the Dao of alchemy, do you really dare to claim that the pill furnace, which is represented by the boundless sun, can exist in your heart? Are you bold enough to claim that the moon, which represents endless pill formulas, can be formulated in your heart? To say that you are fishing for fame and compliments, a flower in love with its own fragrance, is really going easy on you!"

There was no response but silence. Chen Jiaxi's words echoed back and

forth in the square. All of the Black Sieve Sect disciples looked on in shock.

Patriarch Violet Sieve and the beautiful woman had opened their eyes, and were looking at Chen Jiaxi, their expressions serious.

Zhou Dekun's body trembled. He wanted to speak, but his mind was in chaos. All eyes were focused on him. To be openly ridiculed in such a way made him so upset that he was speechless.

Just when he was opening his mouth to speak, Meng Hao's cold voice rang out. "I, Fang Mu, have a few questions." He stood, flying up to stand next to Zhou Dekun atop the dais.

Zhou Dekun looked at Meng Hao as if he were a blood relative. He knew Meng Hao's incisive way with words. Breathing deeply, he said no more, instead taking a few steps back, more than happy to let Meng Hao take center stage.

Meng Hao's cold gaze swept about, eventually landing on Chen Jiaxi.

"Please, elaborate," Chen Jiaxi said, smiling. His expression was one of indifference, but inwardly, he was composed and ready. He didn't know much about this Fang Mu, but considering their first conversation outside of the Black Sieve Sect, he knew that he wasn't someone who could be messed with easily.

However, he had faith in his own Dao of alchemy. Besides, Fang Mu had finagled his way into being a Furnace Lord. Therefore, Chen Jiaxi was supremely confident. A snide smile filled his face.

All the surrounding Black Sieve Sect disciples turned to look at Meng Hao. Han Bei's eyes narrowed, hiding the glow which filled them. All attention was focused on Meng Hao, even the gaze of the beautiful woman, who sat there cross-legged, looking at him with a quizzical expression.

After hearing Chen Jiaxi's words, most of the Black Sieve Sect disciples felt that they were quite reasonable.

"I have three questions," said Meng Hao, his voice cool. "The first

question is regarding Truth. You mentioned the sun and the moon. The boundless sun, you say, is the furnace, and the bright moon births the pill formula. Let me ask you, who invented the pill furnace, and who created the pill formula?"

"Grandmaster Fang, have you really learned so little of the Dao of alchemy?" replied Chen Jiaxi with a laugh. "The ancients gazed upon the boundless sun, and were inspired to forge the pill furnace. As for the pill formula, again, the ancients gained enlightenment from the moon and then recorded the countless variations of plants and vegetation. Thus, I say that the boundless sun is the furnace and the bright moon is the formula. The sun and the moon are a forge which bring forth all living things!" A murmur of excitement rippled through the crowd.

Meng Hao responded in a cool voice, speaking neither quickly nor slowly: "The boundless sun is a heavenly body in the sky. Its blinding radiance makes it impossible to see any other star. When the ancients gazed upward, what they looked at was not the sun, but rather, the sky! You claim Grandmaster Zhou is fishing for fame and compliments. Well, Grandmaster Chen, I say that you are a frog in a well, who looks at the blazing sun, but cannot see the sky which contains that very sun!

"The moon is another of the many heavenly bodies, frequently seen in the night sky. Because of the existence of the darkness and the light, people believed that the night sky and the bright daytime moved in rotation. In reality, among all the heavenly bodies, the only thing that does not move, are the Heavens themselves!

"You assert that Grandmaster Zhou is a lone flower in love with its own fragrance. Grandmaster Chen, I say that you are shortsighted. You, a tiny alchemist, dare to claim that the sun and moon are a forge that give birth to all living things! Since you thus reveal how much you overrate yourself, then I, Fang Mu tell you today, if the sun and moon are a forge that gives birth to all living things, then the forge of the Heavens is what gives birth to the transformations of the sun and moon!" By the time he reached his final sentence, his voice rang out like thunder, stabbing into Chen Jiaxi's heart, whose face immediately fell.

Chapter 251: Meng Hao's Dao of Alchemy!

Each and every Black Sieve Sect Cultivator in the enormous square watched on with excitement. It was as if massive thunderbolts had struck their hearts and minds, and continued to echo out.

“The forge of Heavens is what gives birth to the transformations of the sun and moon!”

The words echoed out, causing everyone to pant. The beautiful woman stared at Meng Hao with wide eyes. Next to her, Patriarch Violet Sieve was so moved that he closed his eyes.

Everything grew silent.

“You...” Chen Jiaxi's expression immediately changed. How could he possibly have imagined that Fang Mu would be able to speak so viciously? He felt as if a sharp blade had pierced into his very heart.

Zhou Dekun took in a deep breath and stood there, trembling. He wasn't excited, though. Actually, moments ago, he had actually thought Chen Jiaxi to be correct. But hearing Fang Mu speak, he knew what he said to be the truth.

Chen Jiaxi took a deep breath and composed himself. “Grandmaster Fang, you startled me,” he said, staring dead at Meng Hao. “However, it doesn't matter whether you are talking about the sun and moon, the sky, or the forge of Heaven and Earth. All exist on the path of alchemy. All types of plants and vegetation can be concocted into medicinal pills. All spirits and souls can concoct the spirit of the pill! What I disagreed with just now was Grandmaster Zhou's assertion that the self is unchanging, but that pill formulas contain countless variations. I said nothing about the transformations of the sun and moon of which you speak.

“In my opinion, alchemists must embrace transformation of the self. Only by embracing transformation can countless variations be produced. Only in this way can you speak of endless pill formulas, or concoct the endless varieties of medicinal pills that have existed since ancient times.”

“Your excellency did mention a person being able to produce countless variations,” said Meng Hao coolly. Once again he spoke slowly and calmly. As he stood on the dais, the breeze lifted his long hair, blowing it across his face, partially obscuring the stellar glow in his eyes. “Countless variations? The wind and clouds, the thunder and lightning, these are all Heavenly changes. The quaking of the earth, the rise of mountains, the flow of great rivers, these are Earthly changes. Are you responsible for these great changes of Heaven and Earth? Is the rain which falls from the sky birthed by the will of Grandmaster Chen? Grandmaster Chen, is it your will which causes the rise and fall of mountains?”

“That was to be my second question. However, there’s no need for you to attempt to respond to it, because you can’t! In truth, you are no Grandmaster. Even if you become one in the future, you will never be worthy to lay claim to such transformations. Can the transformations of Heaven and Earth truly be contained in your heart? How laughable! As conceited and arrogant as the King of Yelang! You truly overestimate yourself!”

Meng Hao was now ridiculing Chen Jiaxi in the same voice that Chen Jiaxi had used to ridicule Zhou Dekun. The words cracked like lightning, causing Chen Jiaxi’s face to flicker.

“You... you really do have a sharp tongue! That’s obviously not what I meant. You’re completely exaggerating what I said. I was speaking only of pill concocting philosophy!”

“Philosophy? I would love to hear some more details.”

“I speak of nothing other than the philosophy of transformation,” he replied immediately. “Take the best of many schools of thought and fuse it into your own. Absorb the finest aspects of your acquaintances. Eliminate the dregs which exist in the self. Refining pills is like refining the self! By reaching perfection, the path to the pinnacle can be trodden, and the full power of transformation can be employed!” The surrounding Black Sieve Sect disciples seemed to approve of his words.

He continued in a voice that could sever nails and chop iron: “It’s like

when a painter paints a mountain. He first observes millions of mountains, and then is capable of painting his own. That mountain he paints will contain the essence of all the other mountains he observed; thus, a masterpiece is created! Similarly, millions of tiny streams will fuse together to create a great and boundless river! This is the philosophy of which I speak. Assemble the thoughts from many schools, and coalesce them in the self! This is my path, and how I achieve the Dao of alchemy!" He flicked his sleeve, and his eyes glittered as he stared at Meng Hao. "I'm curious to hear Grandmaster Fang's philosophy of alchemy!"

His words echoed out into the hearts of the tens of thousands of Black Sieve Sect disciples. Han Bei looked on thoughtfully. Behind Meng Hao, Zhou Dekun stared, an introspective look in his eyes.

Meng Hao looked back at Chen Jiaxi, his expression the same as ever. His tone light, he began, "When a painter observes millions of mountains, then paints one, perhaps his painting contains the essence of the mountains he observed. However, the mountain he paints... is not real. It emerges from his imagination, and is what he believes a mountain to be. In truth, he has already forgotten the first mountain he ever saw, because he has seen too many. He has also forgotten the feeling he experienced when he gazed at that first mountain's peak.

"Millions of streams fuse together to become a great and boundless river. But that river... is no longer the stream it once was. It is the amalgamation of many waters, fused together and indistinguishable. That first tiny stream which dreamed of being a river is now dead, killed by the very process it desired.

"The process of his pursuit causes the painter to forget that first mountain, and because of that, the very reason he wished to paint a mountain in the first place. The process of becoming a river causes the stream to lose itself. Its will is diluted as it becomes a river, and then it is gone." As he spoke, Meng Hao's voice grew louder.

"This is my third question. By fusing many schools of thought, you lose yourself. You think you have benefited, but in reality, you have no path of your own. If you have no ideal of your own to adhere to, then you have

observed millions of mountains, but forgotten why you wanted to paint a mountain to begin with!

“Without principles of your own to stick to, then you are a stream that has become a river. However, such a river has no soul! That, is true death!” Meng Hao flicked his wide sleeve. His words poured into Chen Jiayi’s ears and sent his mind spinning.

“As Cultivators, we must adhere to our own set of principles. As alchemists, we must adhere to our own Dao of alchemy. Acquaintances and other schools of thought can bolster or support our confidence. But we must never allow the process of the search to result in losing our own ideal.

“If the heart is unyielding, nothing can ever supersede it. This type of heart that may seem as if it contains transformations, but in reality, is stable, a foundation. From beginning to end, it will never disappear. It will always exist. An unchangeable heart!” Meng Hao’s powerful words shook the square. Chen Jiayi’s face twisted, and without even thinking about it, he retreated a few paces. His eyes shone with confusion.

“If your heart yields, how can you create anything lasting?!” Meng Hao continued. “Grandmaster Chen, you do not possess a resolute heart. Do you truly have the confidence to mention other schools of thought? Do you have the courage to boast shamelessly of blending together your own path? Do you truly dare to speak to me of the Dao of alchemy?”

Silence filled the square for a moment, and then conversations filled the air. Chen Jiayi was panting, and his heart was filled with confusion.

Behind Meng Hao, Zhou Dekun trembled, his mind reeling. All of a sudden he realized why after all this time he had never been able to become a Violet Furnace Lord. “Over the years, I’ve paid too much attention to the Dao of alchemy of those around me,” he thought. “I’ve picked and chosen randomly.... I’ve forgotten about the path I originally wished to tread.... If your heart yields, how can you create anything lasting?”

Patriarch Violet Sieve and the beautiful woman exchanged a meaningful

glance. Only the ruddy-faced old man next to them sat there with his eyes closed, not having moved a muscle.

A buzz of conversation rose up from the Black Sieve Sect disciples. Meng Hao's words had caused great waves of emotion to rise up in their hearts.

"You...." Chen Jiayi's face was pale. Next to him, Li Yiming was breathing heavily.

Meng Hao flicked his sleeve. His voice thundered up to the heavens. "Because the self never changes, the heart can tolerate the ever-changing transformations of the sun and moon, the maelstroms of Heaven and Earth, and those arduous journeys through thousands of crags and tens of thousands of torrents.

"The Dao of alchemy is eternal. The countless transformations contained within the heart are the pill formula. The unchangeable self is the pill furnace.

"I am the pill furnace, and my heart is the pill formula. Refine the interior to achieve Immortality. Refine the exterior to achieve the boundless Dao of alchemy. Fuse them together, and this is the Truth of alchemy. Alchemy is the Heavens! Alchemy is the Earth! Alchemy is the world!

"This is my Dao of alchemy!" Finally, the ruddy-faced man next to Patriarch Violet Sieve opened his eyes and looked at Meng Hao.

Each and every one of the Black Sieve Sect Cultivators, regardless of who they were, were now looking at Meng Hao. A silence as thick as death hung over them as they stared with brightly shining eyes.

Zhou Dekun stared excitedly at Meng Hao. As of now, not a shred of doubt existed in his heart. All of it had been replaced by passion, and pride. It was all because of Fang Mu, alchemist of the East Pill Division!

He had already made up his mind. When he returned to the Sect, he would help Fang Mu to gain the acceptance of the other Furnace Lords.

Actually, after this debate, it wouldn't take long for the entire Southern Domain to be talking about Fang Mu.

Chen Jiaxi's face was pale, as if his spirit were completely gone. Next to him, Li Yiming was covered in cold sweat and was mumbling to himself. What no one could tell was that he was actually reciting Meng Hao's words, and branding them onto his heart.

An indescribable silence filled the square. Everyone was shaken to the core by Meng Hao's words.

Patriarch Violet Sieve and the other Nascent Soul Cultivators were all thinking exactly the same thing: "This kid... has a limitless future!"

"Nonsense!!" cried Chen Jiaxi, his shrill cry breaking the silence. He leaped up onto the dais to stand directly in front of Meng Hao. His eyes were bloodshot, and glared angrily at Meng Hao, shamed into rage. "You're nothing but sharp-tongued and shameless! If words could concoct pills, then even mortals could practice alchemy! I have been cultivating the Dao of alchemy for years. I have memorized one hundred thousand varieties of plants and vegetations. I know of eight hundred thousand grafting variations! You finagled your way to being a Furnace Lord, but really, you're nothing more than a master alchemist! In this regard, do you dare to compete with me?!" Chen Jiaxi really had no other option left. His previous aggressiveness had been thoroughly trampled down by Meng Hao's fierce diatribe.

It felt like being slapped across the face, like having a dagger plunged into his chest. As an alchemist, all of it was a direct attack on him.

"How do you want to compete?" replied Meng Hao, his voice cold, and his eyes filled with an icy air. He had long since decided to thoroughly crush Chen Jiaxi.

Chapter 252: Crushing

“You and me, a contest of plant and vegetation knowledge!” said Chen Jiaxi, glaring at Meng Hao. In his opinion, Fang Mu had finagled his way to being a Furnace Lord, and was far too young to compare to him, considering how many years he had spent working with plants and vegetation.

He had utmost confidence in his ability. True, there were people within the Sect who could surpass him, but he was absolutely sure that he could achieve victory over this trifling, sharp-tongued Fang Mu.

Even as he spoke, he waved his right hand, causing two black, withered branches to fly out of his bag of holding.

“Dried Spring Equinox Sapling!” thought Zhou Dekun, staring at the dried branches.

“These treasured items have been passed down since ancient times! Dried Spring Equinox Sapling!” Chen Jiaxi grabbed one of the branches and held it in his hand.

“Grandmaster Fang Mu. You most likely do not recognize this item, so allow me to explain. This plant is rarely seen in the modern world, and does not occur naturally. The ancient method used to produce it has long since been lost. It has many uses, but it is because of one of its most amazing uses, that it came to be called the ancestor of all plants! Contained within this ancient plant is the essence of most types of plants and vegetations.

“As such, an alchemist such as myself can fill my Spiritual Sense with all my knowledge of plants and vegetation, imbue it into this Dried Spring Equinox Sapling, and cause it to sprout! The greater the body of knowledge, the more sprouts will appear. This will clearly prove which of us has the greatest mastery of plants and vegetation!” Chen Jiaxi only had these two stems of Dried Spring Equinox. He had previously acquired them through a series of lucky coincidences, and considered them to be precious treasures.

Now that he had been pushed into a corner, he pulled them out, his attempt to grow his reputation in the future.

Meng Hao's expression was the same as ever, although inside he was actually leaping up and down with excitement. He had read about the Dried Spring Equinox Stem in the ancient records. It had miraculous usages that were difficult to explain. One of its greatest functions was its ability to improve the success rate when concocting medicinal pills!

By adding one of the stems to a batch of medicinal pills, the success rate would be increased significantly, perhaps even to one hundred percent.

Without the slightest hesitation, Meng Hao took the Dried Spring Equinox Stem in hand and glanced down. In his heart, he felt that it was a bit unfortunate. This particular Dried Spring Equinox Stem was somewhat small, only about as thick as a finger.

"Grandmaster Fang, let's begin!" said Chen Jiaxi eerily. He sounded like he couldn't wait to crush Fang Mu.

All of the Cultivators from the Black Sieve Sect looked on with expressions of concentration. The benefits they had received from this particular alchemy lecture were hard to quantify. Han Bei sat in the crowd, looking at Meng Hao.

Zhou Dekun was feeling a bit anxious. He had heard the story of the shocking way Meng Hao had passed the test to become a master alchemist. But he was still worried. Seeing his expression, Chen Jiaxi's confidence grew stronger.

He didn't wait for Meng Hao. Instead, he poured Spiritual Sense into the dried stem on his palm.

With a cold laugh, he said, "The appearance of one sprout indicates mastery of one hundred thousands types of plants and vegetation. Two sprouts represents two hundred thousand variations. Grandmaster Fang, I suggest you take the situation very seriously." A bright glow began to emanate out from the dried stem, filling the entire square and attracting the attention of all the onlookers.

Meng Hao's expression was the same as ever. His Spiritual Sense burst out, flying directly into the dried stem.

Time passed slowly, enough for a single incense stick to burn. Suddenly, a green sprout appeared on the dried stem in Chen Jiaxi's hand, the same you might see during the spring equinox.

"One hundred thousand plants... Grandmaster's Chen has already shown mastery of one hundred thousand plants!"

"Who knows how many Grandmaster Fang... huh?" Even as the Black Sieve Sect Disciples began to discuss the proceedings, two sprouts appeared on the stem in Meng Hao's hand!

Meng Hao's expression was calm as the two sprouts appeared. However, the onlookers were shocked, as was Chen Jiaxi. His eyes went wide. He had never seen anyone be able to produce two sprouts from the dried stem in the time it takes one incense stick to burn.

"It doesn't matter," he comforted himself. "Considering my skill with plants and vegetation, I will definitely be able to defeat this finagler in the end!" A snide expression filled his face. However, it was at this exact moment that....

A third sprout appeared, then a fourth, a fifth, and... nine sprouts appeared in total! It all happened in the space of about ten breaths!

The scene caused gasps of astonishment to fill the air. The Black Sieve Sect Cultivators were completely astounded.

"How is this possible...."

"Nine sprouts. That represents nine hundred thousand medicinal plants, nine hundred thousand variations! This Grandmaster Fang is so young, how could he have such terrifying skill with plants...."

"That's nine...."

Suddenly, a tenth sprout grew out of the dried stem. Chen Jiaxi, on the other hand, had only produced three sprouts.

"Impossible!" thought Chen Jiaxi, his eyes growing red. He just couldn't

believe what he was seeing. His hair was in disarray, and he let out a wild howl as he attempted to make more sprouts come out as quickly as possible. Actually, he hadn't clearly stated earlier what level of mastery he had obtained. In reality, he only knew nine hundred thousand plant and vegetation variations, placing him at the peak of the second realm.

As such, he really could only cause nine sprouts to appear.

It was at this moment, right after the ten sprouts had appeared on the stem in Meng Hao's hand, that suddenly... a flower bud appeared. It wriggled out, immediately attracting everyone's attention, even Chen Jiayi's and Li Yiming's.

A popping sound rang out as the flower bud opened... into a tiny white flower!

Li Yiming's face drained of blood. "An ancient Dried Spring Equinox blooming... it's... it's..." His expression was one of ultimate astonishment. He was well aware of the significance of the dried stem blooming.

His voice filled with excitement, Zhou Dekun said, "One hundred thousand medicinal plants, one million variations, one hundred million grafting variations.... The blooming of the ancient tree represents the millions of grafting variations. If ten flowers appear, it represents all one hundred million graft variations!!" He had never imagined that Meng Hao's skill with plants and vegetation could have reached such a shocking level.

Most Furnace Lords' mastery of plants and vegetation stopped somewhere in the tens of millions. Only Violet Furnace Lords could reach the level of one hundred million grafting variations.

"You... you...." Chen Jiayi gaped in astonishment at Meng Hao, his mind reeling. His vision began to grow dim. Even in his wildest dreams, he would never have imagined that Fang Mu's mastery of plants and vegetation could have reached this shocking state. Had he known, he would never have attempted to compete against him.

His voice quavered, and his body trembled. He was about to say something more when suddenly a second flower appeared, then a third

and a fourth....

One flower after another, rocking Chen Jiaxi's spirit. The Cultivators in the square were thrown into a frenzy. They stared at Meng Hao with looks of complete shock and disbelief.

Six flowers. Seven flowers. Eight flowers. Nine flowers....

Every new flower sent waves of astonishment through the hearts of the onlookers, even Patriarch Violet Sieve and the two Patriarchs next to him. Their breathing was ragged as they watched Meng Hao, their eyes burning.

Finally... the tenth flower appeared!

When the tenth flower appeared, Chen Jiaxi's vision went black. He was on the verge of passing out. Anguished howls of grief welled up in his heart. This turn of events could never have been predicted. How could he have encountered someone so... inhuman here in the Black Sieve Sect? In truth, were he to know that Fang Mu was Grandmaster Pill Cauldron, he would certainly pass out immediately.

"Inhuman..." thought Zhou Dekun, his body trembling, his vision blank.

This was not a competition between two people. Fang Mu had completely crushed Chen Jiaxi. There was simply no way for him to even fight back. He was utterly and thoroughly defeated.

Patriarch Violet Sieve and the two others were breathing heavily, staring fixedly at calm Meng Hao, as if he were some sort of precious treasure. A massive commotion of conversation exploded among the Black Sieve Sect Cultivators.

The Cultivators in attendance all had some knowledge of the Dao of alchemy. How could they not understand the significance of what they were seeing...?

"Grandmaster Fang Mu!!"

"The dried stem blossomed ten times! The ultimate achievement, one hundred million grafting variations!!"

Amidst uproarious hubbub, Meng Hao suddenly lifted his head. Without

even looking at the dried stem, he put it into his bag of holding. Obviously, he didn't plan to return it.

"So, do you still want to compete in plants and vegetation?" he said. In front of him, Chen Jiaxi's face was deathly pale, and his entire body was quivering.

He tilted his head back. His hair was dishevelled, and his eyes shone with demented insanity.

"YES!" he cried, staring at Meng Hao, his eyes filled with jealousy and hatred.

He hated that his opponent was so young, yet possessed such mastery of plants and vegetation. He hated that his opponent was an East Pill Furnace Lord. He hated that his opponent left him speechless, both with his words and his Dao of alchemy. He especially hated that his opponent wouldn't let him win, wouldn't let Chen Jiaxi trample over him to rise to prominence.

His hatred seeped into his bones, giving rise to devilish insanity.

"We will compete in Instantaneous Formula Scrying!" said Chen Jiaxi, his voice hoarse. Down below, Li Yiming had planned to pull him back. However, after seeing the wild, animalistic look in Chen Jiaxi's eyes, he simply sighed inwardly.

"Alright, if you want another competition, you'll have it," said Meng Hao coolly. Glancing over at Chen Jiaxi and his maddened state, he added another thought: "However, a competition like that bores me. If you want to compete, then let's make a bet. Any pill produced that the other party can identify, will be surrendered immediately!"

Zhou Dekun gasped at the viciousness of it. This would truly be the fatal blow.

Li Yiming's face twisted. At the same moment, Chen Jiaxi seemed to recover some of his common sense. However, he couldn't let go of the hatred within his heart. He pushed his common sense down, ignoring it.

"Fine! I won't stop until I win!!" His voice rang out, causing all of the

Black Sieve Sect disciples to let out a collective gasp. Li Yiming and Zhou Dekun both seemed to be shaking with anxiety.

‘I won’t stop until I win’ indicated that the competition wouldn’t be over as long as there were medicinal pills to produce. The only way it could end would be for someone to quit, and that would be the ultimate defeat.

Li Yiming was incredibly worried as he watched red-eyed Chen Jiaxi slap his bag of holding to produce a medicinal pill, which he then tossed over to Meng Hao.

Meng Hao grabbed it and looked at it.

“World Mirage Pill. Heavenly Dawn sap, Hundred Tombs soil, Peace Dissemination leaf, Ninth Sexagenary grass....” Having finished speaking, Meng Hao placed the medicinal pill in his bag of holding and looked at Chen Jiaxi.

Chen Jiaxi glared at him. He wanted to say that Meng Hao was wrong. However, they were both alchemists. To do that would lose him even more face than being openly defeated, and he would lose any right to continue.

He slapped his bag of holding to produce another medicinal pill, which he threw over to Meng Hao.

“Frigid Lightning Pill,” said Meng Hao coolly. “Not many of these pills exist. It requires root of Seasonal Glory Grass, harvested amidst the snows of winter, as well as Gold and Iron sap, Lightning Fire Grass....” He continued to list out dozens of medicinal plants.

“This pill... interesting. I’m not sure of the name, but it contains power to strengthen the arms. It’s obviously a body-refining pill. It contains Indomitable Mountain flower, Containment sapling....”

“This... this is actually a magic pill which can melt the blood and transform it into explosive power. It contains crushed Green Burst, Celestial Heaven oil....”

“Fellow Daoist Chen, you have many unique pills. Excellent, excellent. I’m not sure the name of this pill, but it’s clearly a poison pill. It contains....”

Time passed by slowly. Zhou Dekun stared on in shock. Chen Jiaxi seemed to be on the verge of collapse, his face as pale as death as he tried to outdo Meng Hao. However, he really had no chance. He was essentially just handing over his medicinal pills....

In the time it takes for only half an incense stick to burn, he had already delivered nearly a hundred different medicinal pills over to Meng Hao....

Chapter 253: Primordial Heavenly Replenishing Pill!

In the time it takes for half an incense stick to burn, a hundred different types of medicinal pills had been “delivered” over. Chen Jiaxi trembled; his face was ashen. His madness had reached an explosive height as he found that there wasn’t a single medicinal pill he could produce that his opponent couldn’t identify.

This level of skill left Chen Jiaxi in despair. He wanted to cry that his opponent was wrong, but he didn’t dare. If Fang Mu then used the formula to concoct an identical copy of the pill, Chen Jiaxi’s entire reputation would be in ruin.

Li Yiming stood off to the side, watching bitterly as Chen Jiaxi handed over pill after pill, and Meng Hao put pill after pill into his bag of holding. His scalp was numb, and his heart had filled with an indescribable fear.

The surrounding Black Sieve Sect disciples watched the scene in astonishment. From their perspective, Chen Jiaxi wasn’t competing with Fang Mu, he was just giving him pills.

On the other hand, Meng Hao’s actions left them buzzing with shock. His unfathomable skill with plants and vegetation, his irrefutable logic regarding the Dao of alchemy, and his fearsome Instantaneous Formula Scrying just added layer after layer of mystery. As they watched him, their faces filled with continuously growing amazement.

From beginning to end, Meng Hao didn’t pull out even a single medicinal pill. This was because he never misidentified any of the pills that were produced. Eventually, he started to feel a little bit embarrassed.

Chen Jiaxi, of course, had the worst of it all. His heart bled, his eyes were growing dry, and his body trembled. Everything seemed to be going black.

However, he continued to pull out medicinal pills. He had utmost confidence in each pill, and yet they all ended up in his opponent’s bag of holding.

There was no way to put an end to it. Just now, he had said, 'I won't stop until I win.' He wouldn't be able to end until he ran out of medicinal pills.

As he pulled out the one hundred and twenty seventh pill, he suddenly lifted his head to look at Meng Hao. Then, he radiated madness as he slowly put the pill back into his bag of holding and instead retrieved out a jade box.

The jade box was covered with black splotches, as if it had been entombed in the earth for countless years. This was an object that Chen Jiaxi originally hadn't intended to reveal. To him, it was a precious treasure of a lifetime. In fact, when he had uttered the words 'I won't stop until I win,' he hadn't even considered to include this item in the statement.

Suddenly, he realized that if he wanted to gain complete victory, he would have to win at least one time. And if he wanted that, then he must use the item in the jade box. After all the fierce struggle now, pulling out this object finally gave him hope.

The instant the box appeared, all eyes came to rest upon it. Anyone could tell that the pill inside this box would most certainly determine victory or defeat!

The black stains on the box made it obvious to all the onlookers that the box was so old it was beginning to decay. There was even a faint, gruesome death Qi wafting out from the box.

A serious look filled the eyes of Patriarch Violet Sieve and his two companions.

Chen Jiaxi gritted his teeth and slowly said, "If you know the formula to this pill, then I, Chen Jiaxi, will admit defeat and, if I ever meet your excellency in the future, will immediately fall to the ground and kowtow to you! If you don't know the formula, then I will not cause any further trouble for you. I will only require that you return all the pills I produced just now. Then, this matter will be concluded!"

Zhou Dekun's eyes narrowed, and before Meng Hao could say anything, he strode forward and beratingly said, "Chen Jiaxi, you are a scarlet-robed

master alchemist of the World Pill Division. Do you have any face? This is obviously an ancient medicinal pill whose pill formula has been lost for countless ages. How could a modern-day alchemist possibly be able to identify it!?” He was obviously worried about Meng Hao leaping to accept the challenge.

A buzz rose up from the surrounding Black Sieve Sect disciples. “An ancient medicinal pill!” Such pills from ancient times were very rare. Even one would be enough to cause an incredible stir. Furthermore, the formulas for most ancient pills were lost. Even the three great alchemists might have trouble identifying an ancient pill. Each and every such pill could be considered a consummate pill.

“Where did Grandmaster Chen get an ancient medicinal pill? You almost never see something like that! If it were auctioned off, the price it would get would be unimaginable!”

“Could it be one of Grandmaster Eternal Mountain’s treasures that he bestowed upon Grandmaster Chen as a gift?

As the conversations broke out, Li Yiming took a deep breath. Even he never imagined that Chen Jiaxi would possess an ancient medicinal pill.

“Do you dare?!” shouted Chen Jiaxi, glaring at Meng Hao.

Meng Hao looked at the jade box, and his eyes filled with imposing aura. He had seen an ancient medicinal pill before, the day Grandmaster Eternal Mountain had visited the Violet Fate Sect. That pill had been an Entrancement Pill.

Meng Hao thought for a moment, and then his eyes flickered with resolve. He made a grasping motion, and the jade box in Chen Jiaxi’s hand flew over to him.

Seeing Meng Hao agree to the challenge caused Zhou Dekun’s heart to fill with anxiety. Li Yiming also appeared shaken. Chen Jiaxi, on the other hand, let out an inward sigh of relief. His eyes filled with a cold sneer. He knew from the moment his opponent had agreed, that victory was his!

He had acquired this treasured ancient medicinal pill a few years ago

from some old painter. It had nearly left him in poverty, and he had been forced to concoct pills like a slave for three years as part of the deal to acquire it.

He didn't dare to casually consume it; he planned to wait until his longevity was reaching its end before doing so. Or perhaps he would trade it for some incredibly priceless treasure. As a matter of fact, the pill's appearance had already caught the attention of the Black Sieve Sect; it seemed they already were interested in acquiring it.

Meng Hao took hold of the jade box. His expression was serious as he slowly opened it. As he did, a reddish glow shined up from within. Faint strands of celestial music drifted about, and within the glow, the phantom image of a young boy could be seen. He appeared to be dancing in pleasure.

The image instantly caused Patriarch Violet Sieve and his two companions to gasp. The beautiful woman immediately rose to her feet.

The amazement of the surrounding Black Sieve Sect disciples was really at its peak. Buzzing conversations filled the air, and Zhou Dekun's face went pale white.

"An ancient medicinal pill which can create illusory images, this pill... is even surrounded by celestial sound. Just... just what pill is this?"

Li Yiming was also completely shocked as he stared at the glowing red light emanating up from Meng Hao's hands.

As for Chen Jiayi, a fresh breath of life seemed to have washed over him. He was in high spirits, and gave a cold laugh as he looked at Meng Hao. Seeing Meng Hao's look of intense concentration, he lifted his chin.

"Grandmaster Fang, considering your skill in the Dao of alchemy, don't tell me that you can't identify this pill? Ah, forget about it. I'll just explain it for you. You know what pill this is? The name of this pill should be known to all alchemists. This is one of the three great medicinal pills of the ancient Dao of alchemy. Primordial Heavenly Replenishing Pill!!"

The Black Sieve Sect Cultivators didn't seem to be familiar with the

name of the pill. However, upon hearing the name Li Yiming immediately stood up. A look of disbelief filled his face as he stared at the glow rising up into the sky.

“Primordial... Heavenly Replenishing Pill....”

Zhou Dekun was panting, and his body shook. He took a few steps forward, breathing raggedly, staring at the medicinal pill in Meng Hao’s hands. Suddenly, his voice rang out through the Black Sieve Sect’s massive square: “Crimson glow, a dancing child accompanied by celestial music.... This... this is most certainly one of the three great ancient medicinal pills! Primordial Heavenly Replenishing Pill!! According to the legends, anyone who consumes this pill can steal luck from the heavens and increase their longevity by one thousand years!!” The audience buzzed in excitement. A medicinal pill which can increase longevity, even if only by a sixty-year cycle, would be incredibly rare. The price people would be willing to pay for such a thing would be unthinkable.

A consummate pill which could increase lifespan by one thousand years was even more incredible!

Patriarch Violet Sieve’s eyes shined with unprecedented brightness. The only other time a glow like this had been seen in his eyes was when he had been about to snatch Ultimate Vexation. After all, his longevity had long since been approaching its end.

The ruddy-faced old man next to him also looked at the jade box with profoundly glowing eyes. He began to mutter to himself.

With chin set complacently, Chen Jiaxi looked at Meng Hao and said, “Primordial Heavenly Replenishing Pill. The word Primordial includes ten thousand variations of plants and vegetation. As for the words Heavenly Replenishing, it is just as Grandmaster Zhou just said. It can increase longevity by one thousand years!” Chen Jiaxi was now completely back in control of himself. He had suffered defeat before, but with the appearance of this pill, he now viewed himself as having already won.

“Grandmaster Fang,” he continued, “I believe it’s now your turn. Please, tell me the pill formula for the Primordial Heavenly Replenishing Pill, if

you're able!" He glared at Meng Hao aggressively.

Everything went quiet, as all eyes focused on the crimson glow emanating out of the jade box, and the red pill which rested inside.

Li Yiming also seemed to have recovered his wits. He took a deep breath, and his eyes began to shine. He knew in his heart that there was no way Fang Mu could achieve victory now.

Zhou Dekun cursed silently. This was an ancient pill, one of the three great miraculous pills. Its name was majestic, and there was definitely no modern-day alchemist who could know the formula.

He took a step forward. Glowering at Chen Jiaxi, he said, "Chen Jiaxi you are a scarlet-robed alchemist of the World Pill Division. Such tactics as this are contemptible! People like us, even people like your Master, Grandmaster Eternal Mountain, could never identify the formula of the Primordial Heavenly Replenishing Pill! Furthermore, the contest just now was to identify pills that you had concocted. Did you concoct the Primordial Heavenly Replenishing Pill? Even you don't know the formula, yet you dare to bring it out as part of this contest?!?!"

Chen Jiaxi laughed coldly. "This was agreed upon by Grandmaster Fang," he said in a growling voice. "You can't claim that I'm breaking the rules." He ignored Zhou Dekun, and stared again at Meng Hao. "Grandmaster Fang, I'm not the only person awaiting your answer. There are tens of thousands of others who are all eagerly awaiting to hear the pill formula. Haven't you been looking at the Primordial Heavenly Replenishing Pill for long enough!?" He took a step forward and, seeing Meng Hao's brow furrowed as it was, felt all his previous feelings of depression melting away. "If you can't identify it, then so be it. However, you must produce all of my pills from just now and return them immediately.

"Fang Mu!" he shouted, his voice echoing throughout the square. "Can you, or can you not identify the pill formula!" Meng Hao slowly raised his head. His gaze moved from the medicinal pill and came to rest on Chen Jiaxi.

Chapter 254: Thunder Across a Plain

“This pill....”

Meng Hao's face looked the same as it always did. It was impossible to tell what he was thinking. His voice echoed out as if from unfathomably deep waters, immediately attracting the attention of all the onlookers.

Everyone, even Zhou Dekun, seemed to have assumed that Meng Hao had already lost. He didn't appear to have even the slightest hope of achieving victory. Even a Violet Furnace Lord wouldn't be able to identify the pill formula of an ancient pill.

“What of this pill?” interrupted Chen Jiaxi. “Fang Mu, why be wordy about it? Losing is losing! There's no need to struggle against it!” He gave a cold laugh.

Meng Hao looked calmly at Chen Jiaxi.

When he spoke, his words were neither hasty nor halting. “The outer layer of this pill bears evidence of having been buried in the ground for at least one thousand years. Its death Qi is dense, infecting even the jade box. However, the pill has not been harmed at all.

“The strange thing is that the middle layer of the pill is different. It contains only seven hundred years of time. Furthermore, although some of the plant and vegetation variations appear at first to have been refined with the ancient non-smelting technique, in fact, there are actually traces of smelting fire on them.” As Meng Hao spoke, Chen Jiaxi's cold smile grew wider.

“The inner layer of the pill,” continued Meng Hao, “is very strange. There are seventeen various plant and vegetation variations there, none of which exceed two hundred years in age! That is why it took me a bit longer to inspect it. I'm not sure why this supposed Primordial Heavenly Replenishing Pill, which can extend one's lifespan by one thousand years, would have an exterior, a middle, and a center, that are so vastly different!” As soon as he finished speaking, a buzz rose up from the audience.

“What does that mean? Don’t tell me the pill is a fake?”

“How could it be fake? There was obviously celestial music just now, and the dancing child. Those things couldn’t be fake!”

“Don’t tell me Fang Mu is just babbling nonsense?”

As the Cultivators discussed the matter, Chen Jiaxi began to laugh uproariously. His grim, cold laughter echoed out in all directions.

He flicked his sleeve, and once again spoke, his voice dripping with ridicule: “Fang Mu, by simply admitting defeat, then I, Chen Jiaxi, could show respect to your status as a Furnace Lord of the East Pill Division. But instead, you use low-down, underhanded means to attempt to achieve victory! You try to besmirch this ancient medicinal pill by saying that it’s a forgery!? Competing with you has truly brought me great loss of face! What a waste!

“I can’t believe the East Pill Division has produced an alchemist such as you. Such an utter disgrace! No wonder you had to finagle your way into being a Furnace Lord. Now I, Chen Jiaxi, thoroughly understand the entire situation.”

Li Yiming’s expression also filled with derision. Zhou Dekun’s face was bright red. As an alchemist, defeat should be recognized, and respect for the Dao of alchemy should never be forgotten.

He sighed inwardly, and was just about to open his mouth in an attempt to smooth the situation over, when Meng Hao’s calm voice once again rang out.

“When did I ever say the pill was a forgery?” he asked, his expression the same as ever. He appeared to be completely oblivious to the gazes of the onlookers, as well as to Chen Jiaxi’s complacency.

“You sharp-tongued punk!” cried Chen Jiaxi, throwing any thoughts of mercy to the wind. “Are you still trying to argue? Just now you obviously implied that the pill was fake, didn’t you? Do you have an explanation for that? Fang Mu, do you have even the slightest scrap of face left?”

All the Black Sieve Sect disciples were now looking at Meng Hao. Their

faces were filled with strange expressions. Patriarch Violet Sieve and the other two watched on wordlessly with furrowed brows.

“Would you pipe down!?” roared Meng Hao. His eyes filled with a brilliant light that shone like lightning on a pitch black night. His words echoed out like thunder across a plain, echoing out with such force that Chen Jiaxi’s mind was instantly shaken. Without realizing it, he took a step backward a few paces, the sound ringing in his ears.

Meng Hao stepped forward. He spoke, his words devoid of any courtesy: “You babble nonsense! You invert right and wrong! You don’t measure up to me when it comes to the Dao of alchemy, nor can your skill with plants and vegetation compare to mine. You are even further behind when it comes to Instantaneous Formula Scrying. And yet you still dare to bare your fangs and brandish your claws in front of me?!”

“I, Fang Mu, made three points just now, and none of them contained the word ‘forgery.’ That word came from you, you self-righteous twit! This competition was your idea. Defeat after defeat has revealed your true face, you stooge! You ask me if I have face? Let me ask you? Who is there that would possibly give face to you?” Meng Hao’s voice grew louder and louder, each sentence stabbing into Chen Jiaxi’s psyche like a sharp sword. His eyes filled with flames of fury. However, as Meng Hao approached him, dread welled up in his heart, and he again retreated.

“You are a mere scarlet-robed master alchemist of the World Pill Division. Even people above you in the World Pill Division don’t qualify to constantly accuse me of finagling my way into being a Furnace Lord. I became a Furnace Lord because of the graces of Grandmaster Eternal Mountain, and he approved of the pill I concocted. Therefore, repudiating me is the same as repudiating Grandmaster Eternal Mountain, and therefore the whole of the World Pill Division!” Meng Hao took another step forward, his words ringing out around him in a roar.

“Such actions on the part of a member of the World Pill Division are nothing less than treason against your Sect!”

The roar of Meng Hao’s words sent Chen Jiaxi’s mind spinning. His eyes

filled with veins of blood. “You....” His body trembled and he raised an accusatory finger toward Meng Hao. He was normally capable of sharply incisive words, but now, his mind was in chaos, and he couldn’t even speak.

Meng Hao’s words roared out like thunder: “In an attempt to further your personal glory, you’re even willing to repudiate Eternal Mountain and commit treason against your Sect! You are a lowlife, worse than pigs or dogs! What makes you think you have the face to stand in front of Fang Mu and rave so arrogantly? What gives you the courage to stand on the same stage as me when I am lecturing about alchemy?” Meng Hao flicked his sleeve. His words slammed into Chen Jiayi’s ears, causing his body to shake and his mind to reel and rock.

“Fang Mu!” he shrieked shrilly.

“Finally, let’s discuss this medicinal pill of yours. Its exterior is a thousand years old, its middle is seven hundred, and its interior roughly three hundred. It is no forgery. However, it will not add a thousand years to your lifespan. Why? Because this pill is clearly a poison pill! The outer layer is simply a coating, while the middle layer serves to conceal the poison congealed within the center!

“What kind of scoundrel alchemist are you to produce such a pill? Furthermore, what is your intention in bringing it out? Don’t tell me you planned to sell it to the senior generation of the Black Sieve Sect? Upon consuming this pill, the Qi passageways will turn backward, and the Qi and blood will reverse their flow. Within the space of three breaths, you will begin to bleed from your eyes, nose and mouth. Within ten breaths, your garments will be soaked with gore, and you will be in such excruciating pain that you will wish you weren’t alive. After enough time passes for an incense stick to burn, your blood will freeze, and you will be dead!” Meng Hao waved his hand, sending the jade box and the red pill flying back to Chen Jiayi, who stood there, his hair disheveled, his entire body quivering.

Meng Hao gave a cold snort, then continued in a voice that could sever nails and chop iron: “That is the response of Fang Mu. If you pulled out a

forgery, I could identify it easily. But to pull out a poison pill like this shows how truly pernicious you are. Worthy of death! There is no need for me to continue to compete with you!!”

Chen Jiayi felt as if his mind were being ripped in two. “This is no poison pill!!” he bellowed madly.

“If so, then why don’t you consume it?!” said Meng Hao, his voice as sharp as a blade, his eyes flickering like lightning.

“You!” raved Chen Jiayi. He had gone through countless hardships to acquire this pill, and actually had planned to sell it at an exorbitant price to the Black Sieve Sect. However, Meng Hao’s words just now had caused Patriarch Violet Sieve and the other two Patriarchs to stare suspiciously. The surrounding Black Sieve Sect disciples also stared, their expressions grim.

Li Yiming felt as if his internal organs were about to burst. The tables had turned too quickly. Just now, Chen Jiayi had clearly been in the superior position, and then in a blink of an eye, everything had been reversed. Li Yiming’s mind spun blankly.

It wasn’t just him. Zhou Dekun watched on dumbly. He had been very sure that the pill was real, and had never imagined that the events just now could occur. Everything Meng Hao said seemed perfectly reasonable.

“You... you!!” Chen Jiayi’s mind spun so violently he almost couldn’t comprehend what was happening. He had been pushed into the ultimate corner by Meng Hao. If he didn’t consume the pill, then everyone would obviously suspect him.

“Fang Mu!!” he howled.

Suddenly, he threw the pill into his mouth. Immediately, streaks of blood snaked through his eyes, and blue veins bulged on his forehead. He looked like some sort of devilish fiend. Patriarch Violet Sieve hesitated for a moment when this happened, but didn’t move to interfere.

The ruddy-faced man sitting next to him also was shaken inwardly, yet did nothing.

“I’ve consumed it,” he howled glaring at Meng Hao. “Did you see, Fang Mu? I consumed the Primordial Heavenly Replenishing Pill!!”

“One, two, three...” said Meng Hao, his voice light. When he said the word “three,” three breaths had passed. Chen Jiaxi’s face suddenly changed. His body began to tremble, and his face distorted. He let out a blood-curdling scream, and then blood began to ooze out of his eyes, mouth and nose.

Immediately, all of the Cultivators present on the fifty-seventh mountain of the Black Sieve Sect burst into a commotion. Many of them shot to their feet, their eyes filled with astonishment.

Li Yiming’s vision began to grow dark, and his mind filled with a spinning roar that caused him to nearly lose consciousness.

Zhou Dekun gasped, his face filled with disbelief as he looked at Chen Jiaxi standing there, screaming miserably, blood dripping down his face.

Patriarch Violet Sieve’s pupils constricted, and then began to fill with fury. Next to him, the ruddy-faced old man frowned, and his eyes began to fill with displeasure.

Meng Hao stood there on the stage, continuing to count softly.

“Four, five, six....”

As Meng Hao counted, Chen Jiaxi fell to the ground, screaming shrilly. His body thrashed, and blood flew everywhere. His Qi passageways had reversed, and popping sounds could be heard ringing out from within his body. A mist of blood sprayed from his mouth, turning his red robe into a true garment of gore.

All of this was exactly as Meng Hao had described. Soon, the tenth breath would arrive, and Chen Jiaxi would die. However, the moment Meng Hao spoke the word nine, his body suddenly flickered forward. His right hand pressed down onto the top of wheezing Chen Jiaxi’s head.

Immediately, Chen Jiaxi’s screaming ceased. His body trembled, and his Qi was feeble, but it seemed that his trip down the road of death had paused momentarily. From the look of it, though, he only had a few

moments left before death found him.

“For the sake of Grandmaster Eternal Mountain, Fang Mu is going to save your life today,” said Meng Hao coolly. His face was as calm as ever. Therefore, no one knew that his heart was actually surging with waves of indescribable excitement.

Chapter 255: She Was Floating in the Wind

As soon as the words were out of Meng Hao's mouth, he slapped his bag of holding. A pill cauldron flew out along with some Earthly fire crystals and a host of medicinal plants, which Meng Hao began to work with. In front of everyone, he began to concoct a pill.

He worked at incredible speed. To everyone watching on, it seemed obvious that he must be doing all of this in an attempt to save Chen Jiaxi. Apparently in order to completely ensure his success, he even extracted a drop of blood from Chen Jiaxi's forehead.

The blood entered the pill furnace, clearly as a way to make the medicinal pill more effective in purging the poison.

Everything was deathly silent, and all eyes were on Meng Hao as he concocted the pill. From the moment he had stepped foot into the Dao of alchemy, this was the quickest he had ever concocted a pill. It only took a few moments for a fragrant aroma to fill the square.

Meng Hao then waved his hand, and a pink-colored medicinal pill flew out. It shot like lighting into Chen Jiaxi's mouth. His life clearly hung by a mere thread at the moment.

Tens of thousands of eyes were fixed on Chen Jiaxi. As soon as he consumed the pill, a tremor shook his body.

Then, even more shockingly, his hair began to rapidly change color, from black to white. His skin began to wither, as if his vitality had seeped away. In the space of a few short breaths, he seemed to have aged nearly a hundred years.

Before, he had been middle-aged, but now he looked like an old man with one foot in the grave. Wrinkles covered his face, and he emanated ancientness. Before, his Cultivation base had been at the late Foundation Establishment stage, but now it seemed to be vanishing because of his decrepitness.

The entire process, from beginning to end, only took about ten breaths' worth of time. Chen Jiaxi looked completely different; he was now a feeble old man with no Cultivation base. However, the Death Qi which had been drifting off of him moments ago, had been replaced with life force.

When this happened, his eyes suddenly opened. Suddenly he coughed up a massive congealment of blood, along with what remained of the medicinal pill. It was about the size of a fingernail, half as large as it had been before.

It wasn't the pill Meng Hao had concocted, but the pill everyone had taken to be the Primordial Heavenly Replenishing Pill!

As soon as he spat the pill out, Meng Hao waved his sleeve, collecting it into a pill bottle. Before he could put it into his bag of holding, however, Patriarch Violet Sieve's eyes flickered. He waved his right hand, causing the pill bottle to fly out of Meng Hao's hands and into his own.

Meng Hao ignored this, focusing instead of Chen Jiaxi, who was trembling, a look of confusion in his eyes.

"In the moment before the poison killed you, I managed to prevent it from continuing to dissolve. The poison is not impossible to dispel. However, given my current skill in the Dao of alchemy, I was unable to find the proper combination of medicinal plants in such a short time. Therefore, I used the simplest method possible, and also the most direct. I stimulated your life force, and shattered your Cultivation base. In this manner, I was able to force out the poison. As for your Cultivation base, if you practice recuperative cultivation, it should slowly recover."

Chen Jiaxi said nothing as Li Yiming rushed over and helped him to his feet. Chen Jiaxi stared blankly at Meng Hao, then let out a bitter laugh.

"Eternal Mountain once said that alchemic battles are just like magical battles: death can come with a single thought. As of today... I am convinced of this truth." With that, he clasped hands in salute. His body trembled, and he lowered his head to conceal the venomous hatred which seeped out from his heart.

Li Yiming also clasped hands and bowed to Patriarch Violet Sieve and

the others. They clearly could not stay on the mountain, so, he took hold of Chen Jiaxi and flew up into the sky, disappearing off into the distance.

A few Black Sieve Sect Cultivators rose to accompany them as they left. Considering all of Meng Hao's experiences, it was impossible for him to not notice Chen Jiaxi's hatred. Had that hatred not been there, Meng Hao, well aware of how much he had come out on top, would have helped the man recover his Cultivation base more quickly.

But now, he abandoned such thoughts. Long before he had become Fang Mu, he had learned to treat his enemies with icy coldness.

Meng Hao turned to look at Patriarch Violet Sieve, who was currently examining the medicinal pill which Chen Jiaxi had just vomited out.

"Elder Violet Sieve," he said with a polite smile, "I won that pill in the competition just now. If you would like it, sir, perhaps you could state what you intend to trade for it?"

Patriarch Violet Sieve laughed loudly. Shaking his head, he flicked his sleeve, and the medicinal pill in its bottle flew back to Meng Hao. He had scanned it with Divine Sense just now. Even though he didn't know much about the Dao of alchemy, he was a Nascent Soul Cultivator, who had lived many, many years. How could he not have an understanding of things like the ancient medicinal pills? Actually, he had previously specifically studied ancient medicinal pills.

Just now, no matter how he examined it, he couldn't see anything particularly special about the pill. In fact, when he held it in hand, he could detect a fishy, rotten odor. After a brief discussion with the ruddy-faced man using Divine Sense, they had determined that it definitely was a poison pill.

The fact that he so quickly returned the pill to Meng Hao had a lot to do with everything that Meng Hao had just said and done. Before, everyone in the Black Sieve Sect, including Patriarch Violet Sieve and his companions, hadn't paid much more than a glance to Fang Mu. As of now, though, it was obvious to everyone that Fang Mu... far exceeded Zhou Dekun.

This was especially true of his final vicious display. From now on,

Patriarch Violet Sieve would pay closer attention to this Fang Mu.

Meng Hao accepted the pill bottle with a smile, then casually tossed it into his bag of holding.

The alchemy lecture was now over. Zhou Dekun invited Meng Hao to join him at a feast thrown by the Black Sieve Sect, but he politely declined. His face covered with exhaustion, he returned to Black Welcoming Peak.

Back in his residence, he sat down cross-legged to restore his energy. Time passed by, and soon moonlight filled the sky. Meng Hao suddenly opened his eyes and waved his right hand. A pill furnace appeared, along with an Earthly fire crystal. He also produced his Furnace Lord medallion, and its protective shield.

After securing himself within the shield, slapped his bag of holding to produce the pill bottle and the poison pill. He took a deep breath, and took out... the jade box! He had placed it in his bag of holding much earlier.

In reality, the medicinal pill really was one of the three ancient medicinal pills, the Primordial Heavenly Replenishment Pill!

It was only half of the original pill, therefore, the essence of Time AND the medicinal strength within the pill hadn't completely vanished!

In ancient times, pills were not concocted using flames. Instead, the power of Heaven and Earth was used. The jade box was actually the final step of the concoction process. After being sealed inside, the pill would gradually become complete.

This was common knowledge; almost all ancient medicinal pills that had been discovered were like this. Despite being sealed in the jade box, the passage of so much time caused most such ancient medicinal pills to gradually dry out and become defective, although they generally contained a bit of medicinal strength.

Meng Hao had no idea how long this Primordial Heavenly Replenishment Pill had existed, but for some reason, it hadn't dried out, and had contained the full level of medicinal strength. Furthermore, the pill contained the power of Time.

If Meng Hao had not mastered the technique to refine Time, achieved enlightenment regarding the Violet Will Incantation, and refined a Spring and Autumn tree, then it would have been very difficult to spot the uniqueness of this medicinal pill. All three were essential. If one were missing, he wouldn't have been able to pick up on the clues.

Time was both visible and corporeal, yet at the same time, invisible and incorporeal. Ancient medicinal pills will dry out, and reveal their ancientness. This was a result of their passage through Time. However, this medicinal pill was different. It sucked in Time, filling the pill with its illusory power. This pill was actually... a Time treasure!

Because of that, when consumed, the pill would reverse the Qi and blood passageways, and immediately cause the body to begin to wither and age. However, after that, when the pill was fully dissolved, then the true power of the Primordial Heavenly Replenishment Pill would explode out.

That is exactly what had happened with Chen Jiaxi.

The so-called medicinal pill that Meng Hao had concocted was a ruse to cover up the truth. The only function it had served was to smear over the evidence of the Primordial Heavenly Replenishment Pill in Chen Jiaxi's body.

Meng Hao's true goal had been to first prevent Patriarch Violet Sieve and the others from picking up on any of the clues, and next connive his way into getting the pill for himself.

Meng Hao took a deep breath as he extracted the globule of blood from within the pill furnace and placed it into a jade bottle. Next, he put the Primordial Heavenly Replenishing Pill into the oven and began to clean the filth off of it. Then, he gingerly placed it back into its original jade box, which he then held up to examine.

"The true value of this pill to me is not its medicinal strength, but the fact that it encased within it is the power of Time. When it comes time for me to forge my treasure of Time, I will be able to learn a lot from it! It will increase my chances of success by quite a bit." Meng Hao was itching with anticipation. He could only imagine the power that he would be able to

wield after producing his own treasure of Time.

“It’s too bad that Chen Jiaxi... will obviously never tell me where he got this medicinal pill. However... I should know soon enough.” He lifted up the jade bottle, inside of where he had placed the globule of blood. This blood... was from Chen Jiaxi.

“Once I’m able to produce a blood clone, the clone should be able to use its power to see the memories of whosever blood it was created from.” Meng Hao’s mind filled with excitement. As for Chen Jiaxi, he had chosen to fight with Meng Hao in terms of alchemy. His Cultivation base hadn’t been irreparably destroyed, and furthermore, they were in the middle of the Black Sieve Sect, and the victory had been made openly and fairly. Therefore, there were no negative repercussions.

A few days passed by in a flash. The World Pill Division left, leaving the Black Sieve Sect alchemy training fully in the hands of Meng Hao and Zhou Dekun.

Patriarch Violet Sieve personally requested that Meng Hao concoct some Soul Refining Pills for the Black Sieve Sect. Such pills were nourishing to the soul. Meng Hao decided to politely decline; he didn’t want to have to work in such close contact with the Black Sieve Sect. As for Zhou Dekun, he seemed excited with the current situation. He had been giving lectures throughout the Black Sieve Sect, and was feeling quite content with everything.

Meng Hao spent his time visiting the sights in the Sect and paying respects to some of the Conclave disciples. He tried in a roundabout way to get information about Xu Qing. After five days passed, he still hadn’t seen a trace of her.

As of now, he was starting to get worried; the Black Sieve Sect was a bizarre place. The incident with Zhou Jie had solidified this fact in his mind.

On this particular evening, Meng Hao was walking along in an area near the edge of the One Hundred Mountains. He lifted his head up, and saw a woman standing atop one of the mountains off in the distance. She wore a

black robe, and stood upon a stone pillar which jutted up from the mountain. The wind caused her garment, as well as her long black hair, to flutter about her. The instant Meng Hao saw her face, his mind trembled.

This woman was beautiful, but cold and cheerless....

He had been searching for her everywhere, and the suddenly, here she was, floating in the wind.

Her expression was one of blankness. She stood on the stone pillar, looking like she wanted to float away.

This was... Xu Qing.

Chapter 256: Bottom Line

The blank look in her eyes made it seem as if she had lost her soul, as if her spirit itself had been injured.

Her pale skin did not seem to contain even the slightest trace of blood, like that of a corpse which had been entombed in a coffin of ice for a thousand years. The wind which blew across the pillar she stood on was incapable of blowing away her look of confusion.

Her garments were stained with blackened spots of dried blood that seemed to have been there for a very, very long time. Never having been washed away, they had dried and branded themselves onto the fabric.

On her forehead was a wound, a gash that had clearly been there for some indeterminable length of time. It looked like a sword wound... that hadn't healed.

As her garments fluttered in the wind, her right wrist became visible. It had a second sword gash on it.

Xu Qing was thinner.

She was thin, and even colder than before. She looked as if she had just emerged from the midst of a frigid snowstorm. Her garment was blue, her long hair draped around her like a cloak. Her skin was so delicate it seemed as if a breeze could puncture it. Meng Hao stared up at her beauty, seemingly unwilling to even blink.

If he blinked, everything would go dark, light would disappear, and he would no longer be able to see the beautiful figure in front of him.

He saw the sword wounds, as well as her blank look. He also saw that her blood vessels had been damaged. In that moment, the entire world seemed to disappear, except for Xu Qing, standing there on the mountain peak amidst the wind.

Meng Hao suddenly felt a twinge of pain in his heart.

He could ignore Han Bei's secret. He could ignore Zhou Jie's bizarre behavior. The Demon Sealing Jade had spoken to him twice, but be it Han

Bei or Zhou Jie, Meng Hao felt as if it didn't have much to do with himself. Their life or death, their bizarre situations, were things he didn't want to get involved with.

After all, the root of all the various situations was none other than the Black Sieve Sect itself!

Meng Hao had grown up as a scholar, and was innately intelligent and farsighted. How could he not understand the meaning of the words of the Demon Sealing Jade? It was especially obvious considering the divine ability Zhou Jie had used at the end of their battle that year, and the discarnate souls which had appeared. How could he not understand... what had happened to Han Bei and Zhou Jie? And how could he not understand the terrifying power of the Black Sieve Sect?!

He did understand. In fact he knew that the Black Sieve Sect's forces were much greater than the people who walked about on the surface of the land!

"Discarnate souls possess the body," he thought to himself. "The discarnate souls are like those which appeared along with Zhou Jie's divine ability that year, Cultivators who have long since died. It seems countless discarnate souls exist underneath all of the Hundred Thousand Mountains of the Black Sieve Sect....

"This Black Sieve Sect, is a Sect of the underworld!

"Returned from the afterlife, desiring to rejoin the world of men, possessing the bodies of Cultivators and living parasitic lives. Zhou Jie exists in this very state, his body having been possessed. He is incapable of recovering his own mental faculties, and should not have been able to seek out death as he did that day. Clearly, something unexpected had occurred after his possession.

"Because of that unexpected event, the discarnate soul that had possessed him was injured, which allowed his own soul to reawaken. That was what had caused his confusion, his madness, and his struggle.

"As for Han Bei, there is clearly nothing wrong with her. However, she wants outsiders to think that her body has been successfully possessed.

This is because there are not two souls within her, but three! One is her own, one is a discarnate soul from the Black Sieve Sect, and the third... is the Han Clan Patriarch which emerged from the statue in the Black Sieve Sect's Blessed Land, and then entered her body!"

How could Meng Hao not understand these things!?

It was because he understood, that he didn't want to get sucked into the situation. But as time passed, and he hadn't been able to track down Xu Qing, he'd started to get nervous. Finally today, he was able to see her....

And now he understood that... he could not ignore the situation. Xu Qing's soul possession was a bottom line that Meng Hao couldn't accept.

He took a deep breath, then strode forward, heading directly toward the peak of the mountain. His body transformed into a prismatic beam. In an instant he had arrived behind the pillar upon which Xu Qing stood.

He looked at her back, and was about to approach her, when she turned. Her cold features were no longer filled with a blank look. Instead, a grim expression appeared.

In that moment, a sense of impending crisis welled up from the bottom of Meng Hao's heart. As he looked at Xu Qing, he couldn't see a Foundation Establishment Cultivation base any more. Instead, everything was blurry.

Meng Hao's expression did not change. He looked at her, and at the same time surreptitiously performed an incantation gesture with his right hand. Within his mind floated the Eighth Demon Sealing Hex. Because of the way he had performed the incantation, the Hex changed. It floated about in his mind, and stayed there, not moving out even the tiniest bit.

However, as soon as the Eighth Demon Sealing Hex appeared in his mind, his eyes, though they didn't look any different, now viewed the world in a completely different way.

The mountains were still green; the land below was the same land as before. But, the greenness of the Hundred Thousand Mountains was now covered with a black Qi. This black Qi roiled up from all the mountains to

circulate about in the air. In this moment, it looked to Meng Hao as if the Black Sieve Sect really had become a Sect of the underworld.

Strands of black Qi drifted up off of Xu Qing's body and swirled around her. Its nucleus seemed to be in the pit of her stomach, where a flickering globule of black mist existed. Deep within that black mist, Meng Hao could see Xu Qing's soul, sleeping, as if it had been sealed.

The black Qi emanated out constantly, and in fact, behind Xu Qing, it congealed together to form into the blurry image of a woman.

The phantom figure emanated a seemingly endless ghastly aura. It was bizarre, and emitted thick Death Qi as it looked at Meng Hao along with Xu Qing.

"Who are you?" said Xu Qing, her voice unhurried. From Meng Hao's perspective, this voice did not belong to Xu Qing, but rather the gruesome discarnate soul which floated behind her.

As her words drifted out, Meng Hao suddenly sensed that the surrounding black Qi was rushing toward them. It swirled around, forming into countless faces that grinned hideously as they stared at Meng Hao.

Of course, they were unaware that Meng Hao could see them as they floated around.

"I am Fang Mu of the Violet Fate Sect," Meng Hao replied with a smile. "Elder Sister, are you a Conclave Disciple of the Black Sieve Sect? I've been here for a few days, but this is my first time seeing you." As he clasped hands and bowed, he allowed the Eighth Demon Sealing Hex to dissipate, and the world around him returned to normal.

"Oh, so you're Grandmaster Fang," Xu Qing said coolly. "This is a prohibited mountain, please leave immediately." She turned, ignoring Meng Hao and staring off into the distance. A blank look once again filled her face.

His expression the same as usual, Meng Hao bowed again and then turned into a beam of light that shot away from the mountain. He took his time going back, enjoying the sights along the way. By the time he got

back to Black Welcoming Peak, the moon hung high in the sky.

He entered the building and immediately settled himself in the protective shield of the Furnace Lord medallion. His face instantly grew grim. He had been extremely cautious on his way back, careful to make sure nothing at all seemed amiss about him. However, there were still some discarnate souls who followed him. They had swirled around him the entire way, finally disappearing when he arrived at Black Welcoming Peak.

“To save Xu Qing, I have to get close to her,” he thought. “Furthermore, I can’t let anyone find out about it. This Black Sieve Sect is obviously an underworld Sect, with discarnate souls flying around everywhere....” Had he made an open move just now, not only would he have been unable to save Xu Qing, but he would also have broken his own cover.

He sat thinking, his eyes flickering. After some time passed, he closed his eyes.

Early the next morning, his eyes snapped open. He lifted up a jade slip, branded it with some information, then flicked his sleeve to send it flying out of the building.

His cool voice echoed out: “I have a matter to discuss with Patriarch Violet Sieve regarding pill concoction.”

As soon as the jade slip flew out into the air, a Cultivator appeared out of nowhere to grab it. It was impossible to determine his Cultivation base, but he wore a black robe. He immediately disappeared off into the distance.

Inwardly, Meng Hao gave a cold laugh. Ever since his alchemic showdown with Chen Jiayi, he had sensed a Qi outside of the Black Welcoming Mountains. Obviously someone was there watching him.

A few moments later laughter could be heard, followed by Patriarch Violet Sieve, who had come in person to discuss things with Fang Mu. He stood there with a smile on his face, clasping hands and bowing to Meng Hao.

“Grandmaster Fang,” he said with a smile, “please don’t take offense. I arranged for a disciple to stand watch outside to ensure your safety. After all, our Sect is a complicated place, and I’m incapable of controlling everything. According to the information in this jade slip, you say you can concoct the Soul Refining Pill. Well....”

Meng Hao sighed and then in an embarrassed voice said, “Elder Violet Sieve, actually, I’ve never heard of the Soul Refining Pill. Considering that, along with its strange name, it obviously has something to do with souls. I fear that the concocting such a pill would be extremely difficult. With so many variations, it would be very draining. That is why I hesitated to agree.”

Patriarch Violet Sieve didn’t reply. Instead, he stood there waiting for Meng Hao to continue, which he did. “Any other ordinary medicinal pill would be simple, but for strange new pills, even if I wanted to concoct them, I’m worried that it would really be too draining. Furthermore, I don’t really have the appropriate pill furnace....” He gave a wry smile, and looked even more embarrassed. “Also, I don’t think I really have enough of the medicinal plants that would be required. And I’m sure that the medicinal plants require are very valuable....

“Of course, I’m actually happy to help out, sir. I don’t mind getting tired. However, what I’m more worried about, would be the wasted time.... Furthermore, I don’t want to bother anyone during the concoction process, which will require one hundred percent concentration on my part....”

Patriarch Violet Sieve frowned for a moment, then suddenly laughed. “I understand, Grandmaster Fang. I can provide all of the medicinal plants you need. Even if you aren’t able to concoct the pills in the end, it won’t matter. Furthermore, I have the authority to provide you with some Spirit Stones as a way of thanking you for your work. As for a pill furnace... the Black Sieve Sect’s treasure storehouse happens to have a Ten Thousand Refinements furnace. We can gift this treasured furnace to you, Grandmaster! In addition, I can guarantee that no one will disturb you during your pill concocting. It will be just the same as if we sealed Black Welcoming Peak.

Meng Hao's eyes glittered, but his expression was one of shyness, as if he was still embarrassed. "Sir, I am here at the Black Sieve Sect as representative of my own Sect. How could I possibly lay claim to treasured items of your honored Sect...?"

As soon as Patriarch Violet Sieve saw his expression, he smiled and raised his hand to cut off Meng Hao.

Chapter 257: Soul Refining

Meng Hao hesitated for a moment but then seemed to have made his decision.

“Sir,” he said, his voice resolute, “since you seem to place such faith in me, then... I will do the concocting! I will use everything I have learned to concoct the Soul Refining Pill for your honored Sect!

“As for your kindness, it will be engraved upon my mind forever. How about this. I’m sorry to say that I can’t do a bulk concoction. Concocting the pills that way might simplify things on my part, but the medicinal strength would be average, and the pills wouldn’t be as effective. Each person’s soul has slight differences. If I adjust each medicinal pill based on those differences, then I can concoct pills with maximum possible medicinal strength!”

Patriarch Violet Sieve looked at Meng Hao thoughtfully for a moment. From the moment Fang Mu had entered the Sect, Patriarch Violet Sieve had not noticed anything about him that was amiss.

As far as his background, his identity, his skill in the Dao of alchemy, there was nothing at all to cause him to be suspicious. He had been a bit skeptical regarding the matter with the Primordial Heavenly Replenishing Pill, but after thinking about it for a long time, he couldn’t come up with any evidence of anything fishy.

The matter of the Soul Refining Pills was currently of extreme importance to the Black Sieve Sect. However, the alchemy Cultivators of the Black Sieve Sect were incapable of concocting such pills.

Only the East Pill Division and the World Pill Division were skilled enough to handle matters related to souls. With the World Pill Division gone, and Fang Mu being so prominent, Patriarch Violet Sieve only had to think for a moment before nodding.

“There are thirteen Conclave Disciples in the Black Sieve Sect who, because they cultivate a special type of divine ability, ended up injuring their souls. The symptoms are dementia and hallucinations, as you saw

that day with Zhou Jie. Ai....” Patriarch Violet Sieve sighed, and then stared solemnly at Meng Hao.

“We can rely only on you, Grandmaster Fang, to concoct the pills we need. I will arrange for the thirteen Conclave disciples to be sent here one and at a time for you to examine and concoct pills for.” When he finished speaking, Patriarch Violet Sect turned to leave. Meng Hao clasped hands and bowed as he did so.

Not much time passed before a bag of holding was delivered to Meng Hao. Inside were a large amount of Spirit Stones, roughly one hundred thousand. Seeing this caused Meng Hao’s heart to start pounding.

In addition, there was a vast collection of medicinal plants, as well as the formula for the Soul Refining Pill.

Last of all was a pill furnace. Meng Hao took it out, and immediately his eyes began to shine.

The pill furnace was completely white, seemingly jade, and yet not. There were no carvings on its surface, and was a very unusual shape. Not a bit of medicinal aroma wafted out from it. However, what Meng Hao did see were strands of white colored Qi circulating around inside.

“Ten Thousand Refinements furnace!” murmured Meng Hao, palpitating with eagerness. Back in the East Pill Division he had studied a jade slip with introductions to all the various types of pill furnaces. There was one type which, after having successfully concocted ten thousands batches of medicinal pills, would gain sentience because of all of the nourishment it had received from the Qi of the medicinal pills.

Such a furnace would have been constructed from incredible materials to begin with. After the ten thousand concoctions, it would become even more incredible. Such pill furnaces were rarely seen in the world. Generally speaking, pill furnaces are viewed as consumable items, and will explode after one hundred uses or so.

For a pill furnace to survive for ten thousand batches placed its value at an incredible level.

Meng Hao took a deep breath and then swirled his hand about inside of the furnace, grasping one of the strands of Qi and pulled it out to examine. After a moment, he sighed, sounding somewhat regretful. It seemed this pill furnace had been used to concoct ten thousand of the exact same type of medicinal pill.

In this case, it couldn't quite measure up to some of the other of this type of furnace which had been used to concoct countless different types of medicinal pills. However, as far as Meng Hao was concerned, this furnace far exceeded his Blood Crane furnace.

Putting away the Ten Thousand Refinements furnace, Meng Hao stood and then looked outside. A group of dozens of Black Sieve Sect disciples had surrounded the mountain and were now sitting cross-legged in meditation. Bluish light flickered around them. Clearly, once Meng Hao began his concocting, they would employ the full power of the light to create a shield around the mountain, ensuring that he wouldn't be disturbed.

Meng Hao muttered to himself for a moment, then decided to prepare for any emergencies which might arise. He lifted his Furnace Lord medallion, then branded it with some information. It immediately flickered. Moments later, Zhou Dekun flew toward him in a beam of colorful light.

Having received Meng Hao's transmitted message, he ended his alchemy lecture and immediately came to Black Welcoming Peak. Sensing the dozens of Black Sieve Sect disciples meditating in the area, he felt a bit of surprise.

Meng Hao went out to meet him and explain the situation. Furthermore, he asked Zhou Dekun to stay behind as Magic Protector, and to act as his assistant.

Some time ago, Zhou Dekun would surely have refused. However, his attitude toward Meng Hao had completely changed recently. Hearing all the information, he nodded solemnly and pulled out his Furnace Lord medallion. Meng Hao felt much more reassured now, and handed over the

bag of holding with all the medicinal plants.

With the protection of two Furnace Lord Medallions, no matter what the Black Sieve Sect did, he would have temporary protection from any sort of Divine Sense.

As far as the discarnate souls went, Meng Hao had some methods that would prevent them from noticing anything untoward. In any case, he did not plan to do anything too noticeable. In this whole matter, caution would be of the utmost importance.

Not much time passed before two Cultivators appeared, carrying between them a young man in a blue robe as they hurried over.

When they arrived, Meng Hao and Zhou Dekun both took a close look at the young man, and then frowned.

His face was pale white, seemingly without any trace of blood. His eyes were vacant and blank, and his body was emaciated, his skin so thin that you could see the bones sticking out from within. It was obvious that his Qi passageways were not even moving. He was almost like a mortal.

One of the middle-aged men supporting him said, "This is Conclave disciple Huang Zhongxi. While cultivating a secret magic, the technique backfired, weakening both his body and soul. If the Sect Elders didn't maintain his life with magical power, he would have long since died." The man sighed, and then bowed deeply to Meng Hao.

"Muscle atrophy and a weakened body," said Zhou Dekun, his voice soft. "The soul is spilling out and the mind is dying. This man...."

Meng Hao looked closely at the young man, who clearly seemed to have lost his spirit. After a long moment, he approached the young man and placed his fingers onto his neck.

He muttered to himself for a moment, then moved his hand to grasp the young man's arm, after which he closely inspected the faint blue veins visible in his skin.

"First we will concoct a Spirit Fusing Pill to see how much damage has been inflicted on his mind. Elder Brother Zhou, what do you think?" Meng

Hao looked over at Zhou Dekun, who nodded.

“Three Yellows grass, Seven Souls spice, Hundred Years flower....” Meng Hao slowly listed out several dozen kinds of medicinal plants. Zhou Dekun recognized many of these plants as being very rare. All were related to recovering mental faculties. He quickly retrieved the medicinal plants from the bag of holding provided by the Black Sieve Sect and began to catalyze and prepare them according to Meng Hao’s directions.

Meng Hao pulled out the Ten Thousand Refinements furnace. When he saw it, Zhou Dekun’s eyes went wide. However, he knew that now was not the time to ask about it, and suddenly understood why Meng Hao attached such importance to this job....

After placing the various medicinal plants into the pill furnace, Meng Hao performed a catalyzing incantation with his left hand, and then pressed a finger from his right hand directly into the forehead of the young man, opening up a small wound and retrieving a drop of blood.

The drop of blood floated in front of Meng Hao for a moment, and then flew into the pill furnace.

A few moments later, a black-colored medicinal pill appeared. With the flick of a sleeve, Meng Hao sent it into the mouth of the young man. About ten breaths passed, and then suddenly, the young man’s body began to tremble. He let out a miserable howl, which caused the faces of the two middle aged Cultivators to flicker.

Meng Hao’s expression was the same as ever, completely calm.

The blood curdling screaming lasted for the time it takes half an incense stick to burn, after which a black Qi began to emanate out from the top of the young man’s head. Within the black Qi was also a white-colored mist. The two seemed to be fused together. However, neither seemed to be able to make use of the other, and were attempting to disperse.

However, it was as if some power were preventing them from separating. The more they fused together, the more they attempted to separate. From the look of it, they would only be able to stay fused together for a limited time, before completely separating.

“I’m not sure what technique this person cultivated, but it caused Death Qi to enter his body, which then began to consume his life force. It was suppressed, but that will not last forever. Unless something is done to save him, he will definitely die within three months.

“I, Fang Mu, can attempt to save him,” said Meng Hao coolly. “I’m fifty percent confident that I can succeed. However, his blood vessels are already in ruin. I need three generations of blood from his ancestors to create a Blood Vessel Pill. With that, I can reconstruct his blood vessels, and afterward, give birth to a new soul for him. Souls are birthed from the blood, so after this has been accomplished, I can concoct the Soul Refining Pill. At that point, success should be assured.”

Hearing this, one of the middle-aged Cultivators supporting the young man turned and left. After the time it takes two incense sticks to burn, he returned and handed three jade bottles to Meng Hao.

Inside were three generations of blood from the young man’s ancestors. In addition to the requisite latent talent, most Conclave disciples had ancestors who attained high positions within the Sect. As such, acquiring three generations of blood was not difficult.

Meng Hao indicated for the Black Sieve Sect Cultivators to take the possessed young man inside the residence. Then he asked them to leave, and produced his Furnace Lord medallion. Zhou Dekun did the same, and immediately the glowing shield appeared to lock down the area. Outside, another shield appeared to cover Black Welcoming Mountain. Everything was sealed down.

The only people in the building now were Meng Hao, Zhou Dekun and the pale-faced young man with the lost mind.

Meng Hao’s expression was the same as ever as he looked thoughtfully at the young man.

“This person has been possessed by a discarnate soul evading the reincarnation cycle of Heaven and Earth.... After possession, if the body does not contain its original soul, it will become like a walking corpse. Without the ability to sustain itself, the body will begin to decay in a

matter of days.

“Therefore, the discarnate soul is incapable of consuming the body’s original soul. Instead, it must exist as a parasite that controls the body!

“Originally, there was balance, but due to some unexpected circumstances, the balance was broken. Thus, the current situation arose.” A barely detectable glitter appeared in Meng Hao’s eyes.

“The discarnate soul is already damaged. The thing to do is to transform Yin into Yang... turn misfortune into the opposite! As the Demon Sealing Jade said, either seal it so that it cannot see the summer sun, or assist it with the blood will of the Demon Sealer!” Meng Hao’s eyes shone with a cold light. He wasn’t sure if the Soul Refining Pill would have any effect. But what he did know was that the will contained within his blood was the only hope the young man had of living, either now, or in the future.

Chapter 258: Grand Matriarch Phoenix

“Three Heaven Pearl leaves. Dust Wind root, nine stalks. Sixty-year old Spirit Flow sap....” Meng Hao slowly listed off nearly a hundred different varieties of medicinal plants. Next to him, Zhou Dekun immediately retrieved them from the bag of holding and handed them over.

The earthly fire crystal blazed explosively, and the floating pill furnace immediately turned bright red. A strong medicinal aroma wafted out from the Ten Thousand Refinements furnace. Meng Hao fed the medicinal plants into it according to the proper interactions. He put them in carefully, making sure not to waste anything. Then he sliced a cut onto his finger and placed a drop of his blood into the pill furnace.

He exercised utmost control over the concoction process, which ended up taking three days.

After three days passed, a bright red medicinal pill emerged. Without hesitation, Meng Hao placed it into the mouth of the young man.

As soon as the pill entered his mouth, the young man’s body began to spasm. He did not scream, but as his body shook, a blank look filled his eyes. The struggling became more intense. It lasted for the time it takes an incense stick to burn. Finally, his body vibrated, and then suddenly went still.

He lowered his head, and didn’t move. The space of ten breaths passed, after which a gruesome Qi began to spread out from his body. Finally, he lifted his head up. The blank look was no longer there in his eyes, but instead, somberness.

“Many thanks, Grandmaster,” said the young man slowly. His words were those of thanks, but they were spoken with an incredible arrogance, as if saying the words were similar to giving alms to a beggar. He rose to his feet, ignoring Meng Hao, then turned and strode out of the building.

Zhou Dekun frowned with displeasure.

Meng Hao’s expression was the same as ever, but inside, he laughed

coldly. It seemed that balance had been restored between the young man's body and the discarnate soul inside. However, because of the drop of Meng Hao's blood, he now had the ultimate power; if necessary he could directly destroy the discarnate soul.

A single drop of the blood of a Demon Sealer can thoroughly exterminate a discarnate soul!

Patriarch Violet Sieve, the beautiful woman, and the ruddy-faced old man were waiting for the young man at the bottom of Black Welcoming Peak. When they saw him approaching, they began to breathe heavily. They quickly clasped hands and greeted him with a bow.

"Congratulations on your recovery, Minor Patriarch!"

Of course, they didn't let anyone see what was happening. They had long since sealed off the area they were in.

The young man glanced at the Nascent Soul Cultivators. "That otherworldly corpse which fell from the sky has really caused some problems. In fact, our lord is once again in deep slumber because of it. We're back in the world of men, but we still haven't accomplished the task ordered by our lord.... However, you three did well to make use of that person. After all, he was able to facilitate my recovery. Now, we still have a chance.

"Arrange for the discarnate souls of the other Patriarchs to come. As for the one who contains... Grand Matriarch Phoenix, well, no mistakes can be made with her. If there are no problems with the others, send her as well." Having finished speaking, the young man's body flickered, transforming into a black smoke which then disappeared, melting back into the earth.

Patriarch Violet Sieve and the others reverently saluted him as he departed. Then they stood and exchanged bitter glances. With that, they left, arranging for the other twelve people to be sent to Meng Hao, one at a time.

Time passed slowly. Meng Hao treated one after another of the so-called Minor Patriarchs. As of now, Black Welcoming Peak had become a very important place in the Black Sieve Sect.

Whatever requests Meng Hao made were met immediately. Of course, how could he not make use of this opportunity? All he had to do was say the name of a medicinal plant, and it would be delivered to him. Many of the ingredients he needed for the Perfect Gold Core gradually began to fill his bag of holding. Seeing what was happening, Zhou Dekun began to grow a bit envious, and also began to request some medicinal plants.

As they concocted pills, they both slowly began to reap rewards.

In this way, Meng Hao was also able to collect quite a few sets of three generations of blood. They had nothing to do with the pills he was concocting; they were required to create blood clones, and he would naturally not lose out on an opportunity for that.

If blood was not available from a given ancestor, Meng Hao wouldn't press the issue. He would just extend the time spent concocting the pill.

Finally one day, the pale faced Zhou Jie entered the building. This was the first time Meng Hao had seen him since that incident when he first arrived at the Black Sieve Sect. Zhou Jie sat down cross-legged. Meng Hao said nothing for a moment, then began to concoct the pill.

After Zhou Jie left, Han Bei arrived. She had a cautious look on her face. When she sat down in front of him, Meng Hao looked at her and then chuckled.

"Grandmaster Fang...." she said with a smile. Suddenly, she felt very nervous. The voice of the Han Clan Patriarch suddenly rang out in her mind.

"Be careful of this person! He is complicated, and most likely is able to sense my presence!!" This was not the first time she had heard something like this from the ancestor. The reason she had been nervous the first day she met Fang Mu outside of the Black Sieve Sect, was because of the voice of the Han Clan Patriarch.

Meng Hao's expression was the same as ever. He smiled, then began to concoct. When the pill came out, Meng Hao looked over at Han Bei. Her expression was also the same as usual. However, her heart was trembling. Inside her mind, the trembling voice of the Han Clan Patriarch could be

heard.

“That pill... you must not consume it!! This person... he....”

“Grandmaster Fang,” she said softly, rising to her feet calmly. “I’ll take the pill away and consume it later.”

Meng Hao turned to Zhou Dekun, clasped hands and said, “Elder Brother Zhou, I have a small personal matter I wish to discuss alone with Fellow Daoist Han.”

Zhou Dekun laughed. He had long since sensed that something was amiss. However, having been able to collect so many medicinal plants in the past days, he paid it no heed, and immediately left the building.

Seeing Zhou Dekun leave, Han Bei’s heart trembled. “Grandmaster Fang....” she said, keeping her expression the same as always, like a flower. She was about to continue speaking when Meng Hao interrupted her.

“If you don’t want to consume the pill, very well. In that case, however, you will owe me a favor that must be repaid at some point in the future.” He looked at Han Bei with a profound look that seemed to penetrate deep into her mind.

Han Bei looked back at him and gritted her teeth. She was full of schemes, but right now, couldn’t think of any way out. A blank look appeared in her eyes.

“Grandmaster Fang,” she said, “I don’t quite understand what you mean. But, I suppose I can agree to this favor.”

“I don’t need a favor from you,” replied Meng Hao coolly, “but rather the third soul that exists within your body!”

The words entered Han Bei’s ears like a thunderbolt. Her expression immediately changed completely.

She was about to say something when, suddenly, a blue Qi emerged from the top of her head. It congealed above her into the shape of a man. He stared at Meng Hao for some time before finally nodding.

“The Han Clan owes you a favor,” he said in an archaic voice.

Meng Hao clasped hands and saluted. The figure disappeared, and Han Bei stared at Meng Hao, and expression of shock and fear on her face. After a long moment passed, she turned and left as quickly as possible. Before leaving the building, she collected herself, then caused a cold, somber look to shine in her eyes. As far as any outsider could see, there was nothing unusual about her. Soon, she disappeared off into the distance.

A month of pill concocting went by until finally, the Black Sieve Sect sent the last person to Meng Hao. It was none other than... Xu Qing.

Based on all of Meng Hao's experiences, the fact that she was the last to be sent was very telling. The discarnate soul inside of her must be someone not to be trifled with in the Black Sieve Sect, someone of utmost seniority.

Just as Meng Hao had suspected, as soon as she arrived, things immediately changed around Black Welcoming Peak. The protective shield protecting the mountain grew stronger, and countless discarnate souls circled around up in the air. All of them seemed to be looking down toward Black Welcoming Peak.

Seeing all of this, Meng Hao's heart sank a bit. However, the feeling didn't show on his face. He watched Xu Qing slowly enter the building and sit down cross-legged in front of him. She looked calm, and there was much less blankness in her eyes.

Meng Hao looked at her, glanced at the wound on her forehead, then activated his Furnace Lord shield. His face was the same as usual, but as he concocted the pill, he put in, not a normal drop of blood, but a drop of blood from his Cultivation base!

Such blood contained the essence of his life force, including his identity as the Ninth Demon Sealer, and the persistence of his will.

It entered the pill and joined the various interactions; furthermore, Meng Hao used some of the power of the meat jelly to ensure that no clues would spill out. When the concocting was done, he held the pill out to Xu Qing. She picked it up with her delicate hands, but didn't consume it.

“So, this is the pill which helped everyone to recover?” she said, her voice cold as she looked at Meng Hao. Without waiting for his response, she rose to her feet and strode out of the building.

Meng Hao watched her leave, then sat there thinking silently. He was certain that although she didn’t consume the pill in his presence, she would soon.

This was because although she appeared to be in the process of self-recovery, it was actually just a front. The problems with the discarnate soul in her body far exceeded those of the others he had seen, by at least two or three times. In fact, her situation was the most grave he had seen so far. This was evident by the fact that the wound on her forehead was much worse than when he’d seen it the first time.

The next day at evening, within the seventh mountain of the Black Sieve Sect, Xu Qing sat cross legged within her immortal’s cave. Her face was pale white, and her eyes filled with both struggle and blankness. Her body trembled.

She continued in this way for several hours before finally lifting up her hand from her bag of holding. Inside was the medicinal pill concocted by Meng Hao. The process of lifting it up to place into her mouth took nearly ten breaths.

If Meng Hao were here, he would be able to see multiple discarnate souls drifting around her body. All of them were staring nervously at Xu Qing as they flew to and fro.

In fact, outside, all of the Black Sieve Sect disciples who Meng Hao had saved, including Zhou Jie and Han Bei, kneeled before the Immortal’s cave, bowing respectfully. It seemed as if they were waiting for a summons to enter.

Xu Qing still held the pill in her hand. After a long moment passed, the gruesome coldness in her eyes overcame the blankness and struggle. The discarnate soul inside of her sighed. She knew that because of the injury to the soul, balance couldn’t be restored in this body. She was fading, and the original soul of the body was also fading. The body’s life force was

disappearing, and the wound on her forehead was growing worse. She knew that if she put things off any longer, the body would begin to decay.

Originally, she had never believed that consuming medicinal pills created in this world could lead to recovery. However, seeing the recovery of all the other discarnate souls caused her to question her view. After studying the pill for some time, she was unable to unlock its mysteries. Therefore, she decided that she had no other choice than to consume it. She placed the pill into her mouth.

Chapter 259: I Want To Watch You Fade Into the Distance

As soon as the pill entered her mouth and began to dissolve, Meng Hao's blood began to emit a crimson glow. At the same moment, the soul of Matriarch Phoenix within Xu Qing's body began to shake. A sense of impending life-or-death danger appeared, but before she could do anything, a frightening Qi submerged her, making it impossible to send a warning to anyone on the outside.

Suddenly, Xu Qing's soul, which had previously been in a state of slumber, was infused with the red glow, nourishing her, causing her to recover. Xu Qing's soul was being directed.... Matriarch Phoenix was being suppressed by the blood of a Demon Sealer, allowing Xu Qing to rise from her weakness, whereupon, a soul consumption began to take place within the body!

This soul consumption had been Meng Hao's goal all along. He wanted Xu Qing to be able to do what Han Bei had done; fuse the discarnate soul, make it her own. Such a fusion would be undetectable by the Black Sieve Sect and the other discarnate souls. No one would be able to tell who truly held mastery over the body!

One in the midst of the other, a dangerous rebirth!

As Xu Qing raised the pill to her mouth, Meng Hao was sitting cross-legged in his residence. When the pill entered her mouth, his eyes opened. They were filled with a brilliant light. The blood in his pill came from deep within him, so obviously he could sense what was happening.

"The power of the meat jelly's ever-changing forms really is hard to penetrate...." Meng Hao rubbed his face for a moment, then slowly lifted his hand, within which was a jade bottle.

Inside the jade bottle was a medicinal pill. This was a pill he had concocted back in the Violet Fate Sect, before coming to the Black Sieve Sect. The pill bottle was sealed with wax, and hadn't been opened.

Originally, he had planned to give it to Xu Qing, but up until now, hadn't had a chance to.

He looked at the pill bottle, and then closed his eyes.

Early the next morning, Meng Hao walked out of his residence. Immediately, the disciple dispatched by Patriarch Violet Sieve to guard Black Welcoming Mountain, turned and saluted him with clasped hands.

"Please deliver this pill bottle to Fellow Daoist Xu Qing. She requested me to concoct it when she visited the other day." He handed the bottle to the Cultivator. Because of Xu Qing's special standing within the Black Sieve Sect, he felt it was unlikely anyone would open the bottle.

Even if someone did, they wouldn't understand.

A few days passed. On the seventh day, Zhou Dekun kept saying that they needed to leave. Meng Hao could delay no further. He left the mountain peak, flying up to join the impatient Zhou Dekun.

There were no problems whatsoever between him and Zhou Dekun. The alchemy lectures were over, as was the pill concocting. The invitation period from the Black Sieve Sect had long since expired.

There really was no reason to stay behind any longer. Meng Hao had had no other choice than to give in to Zhou Dekun's prompting.

At the moment, a large group from the Black Sieve Sect was escorting Meng Hao and Zhou Dekun out of the Sect. Patriarch Violet Sieve was among them, and was very courteous as they proceeded along.

As for the pill bottle, Meng Hao had been right. No one dared to open it. It had been delivered to Xu Qing's secluded meditation area, where it was received by a girl with a grim expression in her eyes. She scanned the bottle with Divine Sense and didn't notice anything special about the pill stored inside. Yet, she didn't dare to actually open the bottle. She was aware of Matriarch Phoenix's personality. This girl had already done the unthinkable by returning from the afterlife; however, a mere thought from Matriarch Phoenix could exterminate her instantly.

A trifling medicinal pill wasn't worth such a risk. Therefore, the girl paid

little attention to it.

Finally the door of Xu Qing's Immortal's cave opened. As the sunlight poured in, the girl lifted her head up and then strode into the Immortal's Cave. Catching sight of Xu Qing sitting there cross-legged, she dropped to her knees and kowtowed.

"Congratulations on your recovery, Matriarch Phoenix."

Xu Qing said nothing. The girl didn't dare to lift her head, and as such, didn't notice the blank look which appeared in Xu Qing eyes, followed by surprise.

After a few moments passed, Xu Qing stood up. She wore a long, greenish-blue robe, and her features were cold. As she left the Immortal's cave, she coolly said, "Rise."

The girl took a deep breath and then quickly rose to her feet, carefully following Xu Qing out of the Immortal's Cave.

Xu Qing looked up at the azure blue sky, and the bright sun, and the strange expression in her eye slowly faded away and turned into coldness. Deep within this coldness, however, was emotion, something only she was aware of.

"Please call over the other twelve Black Clan souls," said Xu Qing, her voice cool.

The girl immediately nodded, and was about to leave, when she suddenly hesitated.

"Yes?" said Xu Qing, the coldness in her eyes glistening as she looked at the girl.

The girl's body trembled, and she quickly said, "Grand Matriarch Phoenix, a few days ago Alchemist Fang Mu delivered this pill bottle. He said you had requested a pill to be concocted." For some reason, the girl felt as if Grand Matriarch Phoenix was now even colder than she had been before.

She retrieved the pill bottle from her bag of holding and held it out.

Xu Qing's expression was calm as she looked at the pill. Inwardly, though, her heart trembled, and her breathing grew rapid. She made a snatching motion, and the pill bottle flew into her hand. She unsealed the wax and poured the pill out of the bottle.

It was an ordinary medicinal pill, worth very little. However, despite its relative lack of worth, it caused an enormous storm of emotions to rise in her heart.

This was none other than... a Cosmetic Cultivation Pill.

She stared in shock at the medicinal pill.

"Which mountain is he located in?" said Xu Qing, closing her eyes to recover her grim coldness. The soul fusing wasn't complete at the moment, and her mind was still a bit conflicted, and filled with confusion.

"Black Welcoming Peak...." replied the girl. Even before she could finish speaking, Xu Qing took a step forward and then disappeared.

Meng Hao and Zhou Dekun stood smiling outside the main gate of the Black Sieve Sect. Patriarch Violet Sieve and the others clasped hands and bowed. Meng Hao and Zhou Dekun politely declined the offers to escort them further. After exchanging the proper formalities, they prepared to leave.

It was at this very instant that a bright beam of light shot through the air with indescribable speed. It emerged from the Hundred Mountains of the Black Sieve Sect, whistling through the air at such speed that ripples emanated out. A roaring sound filled the air which caused Patriarch Violet Sieve's face to twist. He spun and looked up at the approaching prismatic beam, and his face flickered again.

It all happened in the blink of an eye. Within the space of a breath, Xu Qing appeared in mid-air, wearing her long greenish-blue robe, her demeanor icy. Her grim, cold gaze swept over the crowd, coming to rest upon Meng Hao. Inside her heart was pounding.

The world seemed to disappear around her, forming a haze... except for one space.

This look... is because I want to catch another fleeting glimpse of your figure within the crowd.

This look... is because I want to always be able to see you.

This look... is because I want you to know... I've watched over you this whole time.

Meng Hao smiled as he looked at Xu Qing. She was immeasurably cold, but he was used to that. His smile contained happiness, within his eyes were warmth.

Their gazes met; Meng Hao's smile and Xu Qing's coldness. Only the two of them knew how their gazes reached into each other's hearts. He knew that she understood. She knew that the person standing there in front of her was none other than Meng Hao.

It was the same as that look they had shared outside the Black Sieve Sect's Blessed Land. It was just like the smile underneath the moonlight in the Reliance Sect. It was like the time Meng Hao had turned his head to look at her back on Mount Daqing.

Obviously, this was not the proper place for words. In truth, though, there was no need for words; the emotions of their period of separation were contained deep within their eyes. A look was all they needed to express the joy which existed in their hearts.

"I'll escort you," said Xu Qing coolly.

"Many thanks, Fellow Daoist Xu," said Meng Hao with a smile, clasping hands and lowering his head.

Zhou Dekun stared in shock for a moment. Patriarch Violet Sieve and the others also gaped; they knew who Xu Qing really was, and they also knew that her presence here far, far exceeded that of their own.

Xu Qing ignored them, having eyes only for Meng Hao.

The three of them left.

Far outside the Black Sieve Sect, Meng Hao and Xu Qing stood atop a tall mountain peak, looking at each other. Zhou Dekun tactfully waited some distance away.

“Thank you....” said Xu Qing, her voice soft.

Meng Hao shook his head and looked back in the direction of the Black Sieve Sect. Xu Qing waved her right hand, and the ghastly coldness once again appeared in her eyes. She turned, and her voice echoed out into the emptiness.

“Any soul within thirty thousand meters of this place will be instantly exterminated!” As she spoke, a ghastly Qi accompanied the sound to echo out. Meng Hao immediately sensed the countless discarnate souls in the area fleeing at top speed. An instant later, there was no sign of any discarnate soul.

Time passed, and the two of them stood there in the early morning air on top of the mountain. They spoke simple words, smiling, listening. Time passed, but neither of them seemed willing to part.

In the past, they had been friends in the same Sect. Later, they met in the Black Sieve Sect Blessed Land. Now here they were, meeting again in the outside world. All of these things things melded together deep in Meng Hao’s heart, as well as Xu Qing’s.

Her expression was cold, but her heart was filled with joy. Within her seemingly cold pupils could be seen a touch of warm light. No matter how his appearance had changed, the person in front of her was still her Junior Brother Meng Hao.

As soon as she had realized that Fang Mu was Meng Hao, her heart had begun to pound. There were so many things she wanted to tell him, but as soon as he looked at her, she felt like she didn’t have any words to speak.

The fact that he hadn’t left the Southern Domain, that he was a Furnace Lord of the Violet Fate Sect... this was enough. As soon as she saw the Cosmetic Cultivation Pill, she completely understood everything. She wasn’t sure when it had happened, but Meng Hao’s figure had at some point become deeply ingrained into her; he was now a part of her very

heart, a part that would never leave her.

No matter how many years passed that tried to wash clean the memory, as long as she thought back, she could see that faint smile. The years could not wash it away, so it grew deeper, to the point where she didn't need to think back. She just kept moving forward, because she knew that one day, the two of them... would meet again, and would walk together amidst the snow and wind.

Soon, moonlight caressed the branches of the willow trees, and the sky began to turn slightly violet. The mountain breeze lifted Xu Qing's long, black hair to cover her face. The sight of it filled Meng Hao with warmth, and a slight smile.

The smile appeared on his face, but came from his heart.

It was faint, but like water, it was something her life could never do without.

"Go," she said softly. "I want to watch you fade into the distance."

Chapter 260: Five Years Without a Fight!

As Meng Hao disappeared off into the moonlight, he looked back and saw Xu Qing standing there on the mountain peak. Memories of the times he had spent with her filled his mind.

The first time he handed her a medicinal pill in the Reliance Sect. Outside the Immortal's cave in the Reliance Sect, when he gave her a Cosmetic Cultivation pill. Her voice underneath the moonlight. Then their time together in the Black Sieve Sect Blessed Land. And now.

For some reason, it seemed as if many stories lay therein.

Meng Hao wasn't sure if this was romantic love. The feelings within in him now were things he'd never felt before, never experienced. What he did know was that every time he saw Xu Qing, he felt happiness well up within him that seemed to have been buried deep in his memories.

It was a good feeling.

In fact, during his five years in the Violet Fate Sect, the thing he found himself thinking about most often was cold Xu Qing, standing under the moonlight, her black hair floating in the wind.

"I wonder what it would be like... if the Reliance Sect were still there, if the Black Sieve Sect hadn't taken Elder Sister Xu away? What if we were still back in the Reliance Sect?" Meng Hao looked forward again. The moonlight shone down onto his back as he proceeded off into the distance. Questions such as that had no answer.

He drew further and further away....

Two days later, a pair of prismatic beams shot through the air above a path to the teleportation portal which led to the Barren Mountains. They were none other than Meng Hao and Zhou Dekun. Their task having been accomplished, they were now on their way back to the Sect.

After leaving the Black Sieve Sect, Zhou Dekun, had cleared his throat and then said, "Aiii. You should get out of the Sect more often and make more friends with these Cultivator Clans. You know what? How about

this: I'll take you to meet some of them while we're on our way to the teleportation portal."

Looking sorrowful, he had continued, "We're Furnace Lords, and we spend most of our time holed up in the Sect. You can't deny that concocting pills takes a lot of resources. What you can earn in the Sect isn't enough to survive on. So... ah, Fang Mu, whenever you get sent out of the Sect, don't be in a hurry to get back. Take some time to interact with the outside. They have wealth to spare, and are the perfect companions for alchemists like us."

Meng Hao had nodded approvingly. After the events in the black Sieve Sect, the previous hard feelings between him and Zhou Dekun had disappeared. They now had a relatively good relationship.

Thus, Zhou Dekun spent the better part of half a month taking Meng Hao to the various Cultivator Clans in the region, as well as to a mid-sized Sects, where they were received with great ceremony. No matter where they went, they were treated with utmost respect. Seeing the pretentious air with which Zhou Dekun carried himself amongst these Cultivator Clans made Meng Hao smile.

Furthermore, whatever needs they had were met; in fact, whenever there were opportunities to sell medicinal pills, the Spirit Stones came flowing into their bags of holding. That caused Meng Hao's eyes to shine brightly. During the half month, he was able to sell quite a few medicinal pills.

Actually, most of the pills he had sold were ones he had acquired from Chen Jiaxi.

Finally, half a month later, Meng Hao and Zhou Dekun were nearing the teleportation portal that led to the Barren Mountains

The Barren Mountains were located very near to the center of the Southern Domain, an area that could be considered a major intersection between the various Sects and Clans. Because of the location of this teleportation portal, it had eventually turned into a centralized travel hub.

In a valley in the east of the Barren Mountains was a location that usually bustled with activity. Now, however, it could only be described as

gruesome.

The reek of blood filled the air, and the ground was littered with corpses. Searching through the corpses for bags of holding were a few dozen Cultivators who wore black robes and white masks. Occasionally they would encounter someone gasping their last breaths, and would immediately run them through with a sword.

Beyond the black-robed Cultivators was a black, iron cage, several meters tall. Considering the cage floated in the air and emanated a mysterious glow, it was obviously a magical item. Inside the cage were two Cultivators.

Their faces were pale, and they were both unconscious. They were splattered with blood, and were clearly seriously injured, but not dead. A faint aroma of medicinal pills emanated off of them; they were obviously alchemists. One of them wore a long green robe, which was embroidered with a pill furnace, marking him as an alchemist of the World Pill Division.

Not too far away, three Cultivators were locked in magical combat in mid-air. Ripples spread out through the air. This was not the magic of the Nascent Soul stage; however, the level of power made it obvious that they were not Foundation Establishment Cultivators, but rather Core Formation.

Of the three Core Formation Cultivators, two wore black clothes and azure masks. Their attacks were vicious; they were only of the early Core Formation stage, but were clearly beyond normal.

As they attacked, booms filled the valley.

“Who are you?!” roared the besieged Core Formation Cultivator. “I’m from the Golden Frost Sect....” Blood sprayed from his mouth as he shot backward.

There was no response to his question. Of the two azure-masked Cultivators, one was pudgy, the other skinny. They advanced forward, their attacks growing even more vicious.

It was at this exact moment that suddenly, one of the three teleportation portals in the valley began to glow. As soon as the glow rose up, the group several dozen Cultivators with black robes and white masks began to close in on the portal.

The glow of teleportation lasted for the space of a few breaths, and then slowly began to disappear. Two figures appeared: Meng Hao and Zhou Dekun.

Zhou Dekun was laughing and saying something to Meng Hao.

"I have a good relationship with several of the Cultivator Clans in the Barren Mountains. Next, I'm going to take you to...."

Meng Hao was smiling, but in an instant, his expression immediately changed. Even as the teleportation was completing, before he and Zhou Dekun could see anything on the outside, a sense of danger rose up within him.

Before he could speak, the sense of danger rose to the heavens. Meng Hao's face changed. He flicked his left sleeve, and a wild wind sprang up, rippling toward Zhou Dekun and knocking him to the side. Borrowing some of the momentum, Meng Hao's body snapped like a willow branch off at another angle.

Meng Hao and Zhou Dekun flew off into opposite directions. Almost in the same instant that they left the teleportation portal, a boom filled the air as the combined magical might of the dozens of Cultivators slammed down onto it.

As the boom echoed out, Meng Hao shot backward nine meters, both hands flashing incantation gestures and then waving out in front of him. Popping sounds rang out as the incoming power of the dozens of Cultivators dissipated.

Zhou Dekun's face flickered. After being pushed off of the teleportation portal by Meng Hao, his right hand flickered in an incantation sign and then slammed into the ground. A great beam of light shot out from his body, blocking the power of the magical attack. Despite being of the late Foundation Establishment stage, blood sprayed from his mouth. His eyes

filled with astonishment and fury as he looked at his attackers.

Meng Hao's eyes filled with a cold glow. It had been a long time since he engaged in battle magic with anyone. During his five years in the Violet Fate Sect, he hadn't made even a single attack against anyone. However, his skill in battle magic, and his ability to kill, had by no means been reduced. In fact, his five years of hibernation had made him even stronger.

Some of that had to do with the Dao of alchemy and the Dao of poison. During the past five years, he had concocted no small amount of poisons. Killing intent flickered in his eyes as he looked at the dozen or so Cultivators in black robes and white masks.

The instant he saw them, he could sense the intense killing intent radiating off of them. He saw the corpses laying around on the ground, and the two people in the cage. He also could see the battle going on in the air off in the distance.

He didn't hesitate at all. His right hand slapped his bag of holding, and the two wooden swords flew out. Their sword aura flared up; they had been kept in silence for a very long time, and now that they were out, a massive killing intent boiled up. This caused most of the black-robed Cultivators to turn their heads toward Meng Hao.

"How dare you!" roared Zhou Dekun. "I'm a Furnace Lord of the East Pill Division. You..." He hadn't personally engaged in magical combat for a very long time. Ever since becoming a Furnace Lord, he had trodden a path filled with courtesy and respect. Yet just now, even before he could step off of the teleportation platform, had been the victim of a sneak attack.

Before Zhou Dekun could even finish speaking, Meng Hao saw the eyes of the black robed men beginning to glisten as they looked over toward the old man.

"Not good," thought Meng Hao, his eyes flashing. Without a moment's hesitation, his body flickered, and he shot forward.

He moved at incredible speed, the two wooden swords screaming next were like two stegosauruses that charged directly toward two of the black-robed men. Before the two men could retreat, the wooden swords stabbed

through their foreheads, coming out the other sides of their heads in fountains of red and white.

Continuing forward, Meng Hao flashed an incantation and then shoved his palm forward. Multiple images of a hand appeared. They began to emit a roaring sound, then fell apart into small attacks which shot toward the black-robed men. The black-robed men instantly fell back.

“Zhou, sir,” Meng transmitted to Zhou Dekun, “don’t forget the ability of the robe! Get out of here!” The dozens of Cultivators immediately split into two groups, one of which headed toward Meng Hao, the other toward Zhou Dekun.

Everything was happening too quickly. Zhou Dekun was in a panic. However, as soon as Meng Hao reminded him, he stamped his foot onto the ground. His Furnace Lord’s robe began to glow, and suddenly he disappeared.

He had just activated the teleportation function of the Furnace Lord robe, which he could only do three times. Seeing Zhou Dekun disappear, a cold snort filled the air. One of the two Core Formation Cultivators, the pudgy one, transformed into a beam of light and shot in pursuit of Zhou Dekun.

As he disappeared of into the distance, his voice rang out, “We have some East Pill Division Cultivators delivered right to our doorstep. Brother Yang, I’ll go catch the one that just ran off!”

Without a word, the other Core Formation Cultivator, the skinny one, resumed his battle with the man from the Golden Frost Sect, who was clearly seriously injured at this point. From the look of things, he would be slain at any moment.

Down on the ground, the dozens of black-robed men turned their attention from Zhou Dekun to Meng Hao.

Meng Hao didn’t flee. His eyes glittered with killing intent, and the corners of his mouth turned up into a slight smile. It had been a long time since he had been able to make any sort of attack against anyone. These people in front of him were mere Foundation Establishment Cultivators.

In Meng Hao's eyes, they were already dead.

“I haven't killed anyone in five years. I guess you guys are going to make me break my record of abstinence!” This was the first time in five years in which Meng Hao's Cultivation Base would explode to its full potential!

Chapter 261: The Killing Heart is Still There!

Fleeing was far from the first of his thoughts!

Before fleeing, he must first make the enemy pay a price!

That was Meng Hao's personality. Core Formation Cultivators were engaged in battle not far away and his decision was still... KILL!

As the black-robed men approached, Meng Hao's eyes filled with coldness. He lifted his hands and waved them forward. As he did, no magic appeared. Instead, a cold wind sprang up.

The wind blasted over the dozens of black-robed men, causing a displacement force to spring up. Immediately, the corpses of the two men Meng Hao had just slain with the wooden swords began to expand.

It happened extremely quickly. In the blink of an eye they had expanded to the point of explosion.

BOOM!

Amidst the roar, chunks of blood and gore showered out in all directions, rapidly turning black. A rotten smell filled the air.

As the blood and gore flew out, miserable screams could be heard. The seven or eight black-robed men nearest to the corpses were clearly infected by the black blood.

The blood contained poison!

As a Furnace Lord who focused on studying the Dao of poison, he had long since coated the two wooden swords with poison that he himself had created. He had done this even when he was still in the Violet Fate Sect.

The black robed men looked on in shock for a moment. Before they could react, the ground exploded up as a mass of dark violet vines burst up. There were more than ten of them, which shot toward the crowd of people.

All of this happened in an instant. Blood curdling screams echoed out, and everything was thrown into a deadly chaos. The killing in Meng Hao's eyes boiled, and his body flickered as he shot forward.

He cut a slice into his index finger with his thumb. Blood flowed down, and the Blood Finger appeared, something that hadn't been seen in the Southern Domain for a long, long time. Meng Hao's six Perfect Dao pillars glowed with a violet aura, and began to rotate. His seventh Dao Pillar was nearing completion, and was now around eighty percent formed.

Power invincible to the Foundation Establishment stage poured out from Meng Hao. A massive crushing pressure emanated out in all directions. These black-robed men were of the full circle of Foundation Establishment. However, their Dao Pillars immediately began to shake. Their faces filled with astonishment. Meng Hao's fearsomeness exceeding anything they could have imagined.

How could they ever have predicted that this stranger who had charged into their trap looking like a weak scholar, was actually a divinity of death!

Meng Hao hadn't fought for five years, and now that he did, he made only killing moves. The index finger of his right hand flashed like lightning, slamming down onto the mask of one of the black-robed men. It pierced through the mask, stabbing down into his forehead. Perfect Dao Pillar power burst out, transforming into a terrifying, all-encompassing explosive force. It immediately destroyed the man's Dao Pillars and Core sea, crushing his will, exterminating his life.

Meng Hao's face was cold as he took hold of the man's corpse. He took a step forward, toward another black-robed man. He squeezed the corpse, which subsequently exploded. Blackened blood splashed out in all directions. A look of shock appeared on the other man's face, and he wasn't fast enough to avoid the blood. It drenched him, and immediately, terrifying screams filled the air. Meng Hao moved on toward another black-robed man.

His body flitted around like an evil spirit. Beneath his mask, the face of one of the black-robed men twisted. Without hesitation, he bit down on

his tongue, spitting out a blood mist which spread out mysteriously to cover his body. He had to attempt to delay Meng Hao; there were still three other black-robed men nearby who were approaching with magical items in hand.

Meng Hao gave a cold snort, which echoed out like a clap of thunder. The sound pierced to the very hearts of the four remaining black-robed men. The three who were currently approaching suddenly stopped in their tracks. The man who had just employed the blood mist felt as if his mind was spinning out of control.

Meng Hao's right knee flew into the air, slamming viciously into the blood mist. It immediately fell into pieces and scattered. His knee continued on, slamming into the black-robed man's chest. Even as the cracking of bones rang out, Meng Hao's right hand snaked out to latch onto the man's neck.

He turned, and spit out the lightning mist, and a boom filled the air as it enveloped them all. Screams rang out, and after the space of a few breaths, Meng Hao emerged from within. The three men who had just been approaching were now dead, their eyes still wide with astonishment. Even up to the moment death took them, they couldn't understand how an alchemist... could have such intense killing intent.

Originally there had been twenty seven black robed men. In just a few moments, their numbers were reduced to eleven. Their minds were shaken, and they backed up nervously. The person in front of them didn't seem to be a single Cultivator, but an entire army.

Meng Hao's hair swirled around his head. The dozen or so tentacles writhed in the air around him bizarrely as he stood there. He emanated the smell of medicinal pills, and the stench of blood. His cold face, his grim eyes, all of it, caused the black-robed men's heart to shake.

"Who are you?!" asked one of the black-robed men, his voice quivering. It was a question that Meng Hao should have been the one to ask.

Meng Hao didn't respond. His clothes fluttered in the wind. It was a north wind, blowing stiffly, as if it wished to wash away the reeking smell

of blood. As the north wind blew, Meng Hao lifted his hand. There in his palm appeared a bit of red powder.

The powder lifted up into the wind, blowing about. The faces of the black-robed men twisted as they thought back to the hyper toxic poison from moments ago.

Without the slightest hesitation, the eleven men retreated. However, even as they did, Meng Hao made an incantation gesture and then pointed out with his finger. A mass of tiny Flame Globes appeared. As they floated in mid-air, they began to change into a green color.

The ignited, and suddenly a massive, green Flame Sea appeared. It was shocking, its heat impossible to describe as it expanded along with the wind, seeming to mix with the powder that was floating in mid-air.

The raging three thousand meter wide Flame Sea expanded out, and as it did, it seemed as if the surrounding valley couldn't withstand the heat. It began to crack and melt.

The eleven black-robed men were moving backward quickly, but they simply weren't fast enough to escape the ghostly, greenish Flame Sea, and were consumed.

It was at this same moment that a boom could be heard off in the distance. With a single blow, the azure-masked Cultivator lopped off the head of the Golden Frost Sect Cultivator. Then he turned, a grim look appeared in his eyes as he looked at Meng Hao, just barely visible behind the Flame Sea

Separated by the Flame Sea, Meng Hao looked back at the azure-masked Cultivator. Their gazes locked as the screams of the dying black-robed Cultivators drifted up from within the flames.

Glancing at Meng Hao's clothing, the azure-masked Cultivator said, "Such a young East Pill Division Furnace Lord. There's only one person like that.... You must be Fang Mu!" His voice was hoarse and muffled, yet filled with coldness.

"Cultivators with killing intent like this can only be found in one place

in the Southern Domain,” replied Meng Hao coolly. “The Black Lands.” Actually, from the moment he had first laid eyes on the black-robed Cultivators, something about them had seemed familiar. It was the same feeling he’d gotten from that Cultivator in the Black Sieve Sect’s Blessed Land, the one who had told him about the usefulness of the Thunderclap Leaf to Black Lands Cultivators.

Meng Hao couldn’t tell what the azure-masked Cultivator was thinking. What he saw was the man take a seemingly leisurely step forward. In actuality, he was moving very quickly and was apparently planning to cross the Flame Sea. A wind sprang up, and it appeared as if he planned to carve a path through the flames.

The instant the azure-masked Cultivator shot forward, Meng Hao’s Furnace Lord garment began to flicker. Even as the man passed through the sea to arrive in front of Meng Hao, Meng Hao’s body began to fade away.

At some point, the azure-masked had called forth flying swords, which passed harmlessly through the disappearing image of Meng Hao.

“Fang Mu, prominent in the East Pill Division of the Violet Fate Sect, victor of the Dao alchemy debate in the Black Sieve Sect between the East Pill Division and the World Pill Division.” The azure-masked Cultivator’s voice was cool. He didn’t seem to be in a rush to pursue. As he spoke, his right hand slowly lifted and began to make an incantation.

“You are the ninth alchemist on our list. How fortunate to run into you. You won’t escape.” The man’s eyes flickered, and even as he finished speaking, his fingers finished with the incantation.

“Ahh, that direction.” The azure-masked Cultivator’s body flickered, and he shot off like lightning. His speed was far, far greater than that of the Foundation Establishment stage. They weren’t even remotely on the same level. Even more shocking was his Core Qi. Core Qi could only be employed by Core Formation Cultivators. Because the varying techniques and power levels of each Cultivator, the Core Qi they employ will be different colors.

However, even the weakest Core Qi is sufficient to crush the great circle of late Foundation Establishment. Even a group of late Foundation Establishment Cultivators wouldn't have the hope of raising a hand to a Core Formation Cultivator using Core Qi.

Core Qi can make Core Formation magic reach the pinnacle. Afterwards, when the Cultivator reaches the Nascent Soul Stage, their magic will be half way to the point of divine ability.

This azure-masked Cultivator's Core Qi was a light yellowish color, which indicated that he had an Orange Core. As the Core Qi emanated out, the indistinct shape of a roc seemed to exist inside of it.

Core Qi had ever-changing forms which can alter according to the will of the Cultivator. For example, the roc which appeared in the mind of this Cultivator added explosive speed to the Core Qi.

It was because of this characteristic that allowed Core Formation magic to employ its greatest power!

It was also why it only took about ten breaths of time before Meng Hao, who was fleeing at top speed, suddenly sensed an incredibly powerful Qi approaching from behind him.

This was not the first time he had faced Core Formation Cultivators. He didn't have much reverence for them. Even back in the State of Zhao, he had led Core Formation Cultivators to their deaths.

Just as the Core Formation Cultivator was almost upon him, the Furnace Lord garment flickered again, and he was immediately transported about forty kilometers away.

Without hesitation, he began to flee. In his palm was the good luck charm, which he hadn't used in five years. It was flickering, but he could tell that it would be some time before he could activate it.

"My seventh Dao Pillar is almost complete. However, I'm still no match for a Core Formation Cultivator. However, I have enough Spirit Stones, enough medicinal plants, and enough medicinal pills.... I have to push forward without stopping until I reach the great circle of Foundation

Establishment!” Resolve appeared in his eyes. Soon he would be able to employ the full accumulated knowledge of five years of studying the Dao of alchemy!

Chapter 262: First Battle with Core Formation!

A shocking roar sounded out in all directions. At the same time, a frigid Qi raced toward Meng Hao.

Thirty breaths had passed since Meng Hao used the Furnace Lord robe to displace himself for the second time.

Before he could fly much further away, the azure-masked Cultivator was in hot pursuit. In this instance, the man was clearly some distance away; however the light yellow glow continued to emanate from the top of his head. In it, the image of a sword was faintly visible.

It appeared illusory, but even glancing at it from this distance caused Meng Hao's heart to tremble. An intense feeling of danger filled his heart and mind.

"This guy has cultivated Core Qi!" thought Meng Hao. He was no longer a newcomer to the Cultivator World. He had seen and experienced many things, and had learned long ago of the fearsomeness of Core Formation, especially the shocking Core Qi.

Back in the state of Zhao, none of the Core Formation Cultivators he had met had been able to utilize Core Qi, except perhaps for the old woman. All of this was information Meng Hao had deduced from reading the ancient records of the East Pill Division.¹

"Core Qi has ever-changing forms. However, it has a nucleus which does not change. I wonder what the essence of this guy's Core Qi is...." His heart trembled, but suddenly an idea flickered into his mind.

At the same time, he unhesitatingly used the Furnace Lord's ability to warp away to another location. As soon as his body disappeared, the sword image appeared, with its power to shake Heaven and Earth. The Qi rose up, a sealing force that locked down the entire area. However, Meng Hao's illusory body was able to slip past it.

“What a nimble and crafty alchemist,” said the azure-robed Cultivator. “However, you can only use that robe three times, and it won’t take you more than fifty kilometers away. Let see... how you plan to escape next time!” The Cultivator closed his eyes, and the light yellow Core Qi spread out. The illusory sword flickered and began to rotate. After the space of three breaths, it began to hum, and the tip pointed north.

The azure-masked Cultivator’s eyes snapped open, and his body flickered as he shot off toward the north.

Forty kilometers away, Meng Hao reappeared. As soon as he did, blood began to seep out of the corners of his mouth. There was a sword wound on his chest, from which blood flowed out. If he had teleported away even a tiny bit slower, the sword just now would have cleaved him in half.

He didn’t take the time to wipe the blood from his mouth. His body flashed like lightning as he shot away.

“A phantom sword. I wonder if this guy’s personal Core Qi is a sword....” A grim look appeared on Meng Hao’s face. A Core Formation Cultivator who had not cultivated Core Qi wouldn’t cause Meng Hao to be in such a tight spot. However, Core Qi is the most powerful tool of Core Formation Cultivators. Meng Hao knew that for this azure-masked Cultivator to have cultivated Core Qi in the early Core Formation stage, indicated that he had incredibly high latent talent.

After becoming a Furnace Lord, Meng Hao had done quite a bit of research in the ancient records about the Core Formation stage. Therefore, he was quite familiar with things such as Core Qi. Generally speaking, Core Qi is cultivated in the late Core Formation stage, or occasionally the mid Core Formation stage. Only a small group of Chosen can cultivate Core Qi in the early Core Formation stage.

Such Cultivators are very rare. The rarest of all are those who seem to innately possess Core Qi from the moment they step into early Core Formation.

Within the ever-changing forms of Core Qi is a form that does not change. This is a personal form related to the individual Cultivator, which

is different for every Cultivator.

Meng Hao's face was dark as he charged forward. He popped a medicinal pill into his mouth. As it dissolved, warmth filled his body, and his speed increased.

"Thirty breaths left...." The good luck charm in his hand had been warming up from the moment he began to fight the black-robed men. As of now, there were still thirty breaths left before he could activate it.

When that happened, Meng Hao would disappear, and the azure-masked Cultivator would have no way to track him down.

However, after eighteen breaths passed, the glow of the light yellow Core Qi filled the sky. The bitterly cold Qi appeared again. Off in the distance, the thin frame of the azure-masked Cultivator could be seen in mid-air. The surroundings seem to be shaken into a jumble as he approached relentlessly.

As soon as Meng Hao sensed his approach, he slapped his bag of holding to produce a jade pendant, which he smashed between his fingers.

"I, Yang, already said that you can't get away," the azure-masked Cultivator said coolly. "You're a trifling Foundation Establishment Cultivator. You should feel proud that you managed to scurry around for this long." The sword image in the Core Qi emitted an ear-piercing scream. Emanating an icy coldness, it shot directly toward Meng Hao.

Its speed was incredible, and in the blink of an eye... was directly in front of him.

It sped directly toward his forehead, and was about to pierce it through. There was absolutely no time for Meng Hao to dodge. The difference between their two Cultivation bases was too great. Death approached.

However, at this exact moment, a glow shot out from Meng Hao's palm. A rippling, water-like glow flowed out to cover Meng Hao's body. It expanded out, forming a greenish-blue shield, which the Core Qi phantom sword slammed into.

The azure-masked Cultivator's eyes went wide underneath his mask

when he saw the shield. His pupils constricted, and an expression of disbelief appeared in his eyes. He was about to recall his Core Qi phantom sword, but was too late.

The Core Qi phantom sword, seemingly infinitely sharp, noiselessly slammed into the greenish-blue shield. Instantly it weakened and then began to break into pieces. In the blink of an eye, it was transformed into dust.

Seeing the Core Qi phantom sword disappear into powder caused the azure-masked Cultivator to give an irritated harrumph. Beneath his mask, blood oozed out of his mouth. His eyes filled with fury. He was a Core Formation Cultivator who had cultivated Core Qi. However, during this attempt to toy with a measly Foundation Establishment Cultivator, his Core Qi had been shattered, causing him injury.

“Nascent Soul Cultivation blood.... Let’s see how many times you can pull that off!” The killing intent in the azure-masked Cultivator’s eyes grew more intense. He shot toward Meng Hao, his right hand flickering an incantation gesture. Magical power erupted, transforming into ten dragons and ten phoenixes, which spiralled toward Meng Hao.

At the same time, the greenish-blue shield began to shrink, returning into Meng Hao’s palm and transforming into a jade pendant. This pendant was one of the spoils of his victory in the Solitary Sword Sect. It was a life-saving treasure that contained blood from the Cultivation base of Chen Fan’s Master, Zhou Yanyun, and could defend against an attack from a Nascent Soul Cultivator. ²

It could defend against an attack by a Nascent Soul Cultivator, but could only be used once at a time. Defending against a Core Formation Cultivator caused its glow to weaken, and it still could be used again, just not right now.

The azure-masked Cultivator’s mouth was oozing with blood. He had been injured, and the Core Qi above his head was unstable. However, he continued to advance toward Meng Hao, the ten dragons and ten phoenixes howling as they shot through the air. Suddenly, an intense

killing intent appeared in Meng Hao's eyes.

He did not flee, but instead lifted his hand and pointed toward the azure-masked Cultivator.

"Eighth Demon Sealing Hex!" Veins of blood shot through his eyes. As he pointed his finger out, Heaven and Earth shook, Meng Hao's body moved, everything moved. Even the ten dragons and ten phoenixes moved. Ghost images sprang up and pressed down toward the the azure-masked Cultivator.

The azure-masked Cultivator's expression flickered. The ten dragons and ten phoenixes began to tremble, as if they were being held down. The world seemed to turn upside down; everything in the area was sealed.

The sealing was such that the azure-masked Cultivator seemed incapable of controlling his Cultivation base.

"What magic is this?!" he said, his heart shaking.

Veins of blood filled Meng Hao's eye, and he coughed up a mouthful of blood. Using the sealing hex on a Core Formation Cultivator was an incredible load; all the blood vessels in his body seemed on the verge of bursting. Meng Hao's killing intent soared. He flicked his sleeve, and a red powder flew out, filling the area, transforming into a red mist. The mist roiled, and as Meng Hao moved forward, it shot toward the azure-masked Cultivator.

At the same time, Meng Hao placed the life-saving jade pendant into his robe. His left hand rose up, and he slashed one finger, two fingers, three fingers... all five fingers! Blood flowed down all five of his fingers, forming... the Blood Palm!

When the Blood Palm appeared, the red mist around him seethed even more violently, seeming to transform into a mist of blood. The mist began to erode everything in the area; it seemed to be hyper toxic, adding thirty percent power to Meng Hao's attack.

All of this takes a long time to describe, but actually occurred in an instant. As Meng Hao's multiple killing attacks descended upon the azure-

masked Cultivator, the man's eyes went wide. Suddenly, he was able to move again; after all, he was a Core Formation Cultivator. The Eighth Hex was beyond ordinary, but couldn't keep the man sealed for more than two breaths.

"Insignificant skill! DIE!" howled the azure-masked Cultivator. His right hand flickered in an incantation gesture and then pushed out toward Meng Hao. Instantly, a roaring filled the air, and an illusory, ten-headed dragon appeared. Snarling fiercely, it shot to meet Meng Hao's magical attack. A boom rang out.

The red mist collapsed. The Blood Palm disintegrated. Blood sprayed from Meng Hao's mouth as he was tossed backward like a kite with its string cut. The azure-masked Cultivator was about to shoot after him. However, the man's eyes went wide as Meng Hao, even in the midst of being seriously injured and tossed backward, suddenly slapped his bag of holding. He flicked his sleeve, sending more powder out to fill the air. It was thin, but it was enough to cause the azure-masked Cultivator to pause momentarily.

Moments ago, he had prevented the blood mist from entering his lungs. However, he had still been able to sense the terrifying power of the mist. That was because he had a tiny cut on the pinky of his right hand which had been slightly infected. That tiny bit caused an intense pain to shoot through him.

Even as blood sprayed from Meng Hao's mouth and he toppled backward, his pupils began to glow with a violet light. His skin and Qi passageways also began to glow violet, making his entire body glow.

This was the Violet Pupil Transformation! ³

Within Violet Pupil Transformation, Meng Hao's body began to recover rapidly. Surrounded by poison mist, he glared at the azure-masked Cultivator and the Core Qi which emanated from his head. The man was stabilizing rapidly. Within ten breaths at the most, he would be able to release his Core Qi.

Meng Hao didn't hesitate a moment longer. He immediately pressed

down on the good luck charm, activating the teleportation ability.

Instantly, a black hole appeared, a massive mouth which consumed Meng Hao. This turn of events caught the azure-masked Cultivator completely by surprise. His face flickered, and he shot forward in pursuit.

He was too late.

*

1. The reference to the old woman is from way back in chapter 81, when Meng Hao led the people into Patriarch Reliance's Immortal's Cave.
2. Meng Hao won the pendant in chapter 185. And in case you forgot, Zhou Yanyun is the guy who took Chen Fan from the Reliance Sect way back in Chapter 43.
3. Meng Hao learned Violet Pupil Transformation in chapter 242.

Chapter 263: Ancient Dao Geyser

The azure-masked Cultivator's expression was somber. His eyes radiated coldness, a deep coldness that contained fury. From the moment he had entered the Core Formation stage and cultivated Core Qi, he had been able to sweep with ease across any other Cultivator who lacked Core Qi.

But today, a Foundation Establishment Cultivator had disintegrated his Core Qi, injuring him in the process, and then had just as quickly suppressed him. Despite all this, his fury burned as hotly as ever.

Even more infuriating was that someone he viewed to be as weak as an ant, had before his very eyes slaughtered all of his white-masked men. Such provocation caused killing intent to rise within his heart. However... even beneath such killing intent, the man had fled.

The coldness in the man's eyes grew even sharper. He knew that if his fellow Sect members learned of this, they would surely ridicule him. After all, the Cultivator who had escaped from his hands was not adept in magic, but alchemy.

He couldn't accept it, nor could he understand what had happened. In fact, among all the Cultivators he knew who were famous for their abilities in magic, he couldn't think of any who could compare to this alchemist.

In terms of decisiveness, fighting skill, and treachery, he couldn't help but think that this alchemist who had just fled, really seemed like a ruthless Black Lands Cultivator.

"How could there be an alchemist like this?!" He stared at the place where Meng Hao had just disappeared from. His Core Qi was now fully restored, but no matter how he cast his senses about, he couldn't pick up the slightest track to follow.

It was clear that his opponent had teleported to somewhere very far away, somewhere he could not sense.

After some time passed, the azure-masked Cultivator gave a cold

harrumph. “Well, he was injured by the frigid power of my Ten Flood Dragons. He can run away from me, but not from death, even if he is a Furnace Lord. Let’s see whether or not he dies in the end.

“He’s looking for death.... Foundation Establishment Cultivator.... No one can live more than ten days after being hit by the frigid power of my Ten Flood Dragons.” Abandoning thoughts of pursuing and killing, he turned and disappeared.

In the western region of the great Southern Domain is an area covered with thin mists. Few mountain ranges exist, and many lakes can be seen. Among them is one of the famous three Danger Zones of the Southern Domain, the Ancient Dao Lake.

At a glance, the western regions seem to be covered with a myriad of mirrors placed on the ground. These mirrors are of course the countless lakes.

At this moment, above the middle of the one of the lakes, the previously glass-like waters suddenly began to ripple. A massive black hole appeared, and Meng Hao staggered out.

The instant he appeared, he coughed up a huge mouthful of blood. The blood was black, and emitted frigid Qi. It splashed into the lake, and disappeared. However, moments later, the surface of the lake was covered in a thin sheet of ice.

Meng Hao’s face was pale. He lifted his head and looked around, then transformed into a prismatic beam that shot off into the distance.

Several days later, in one of the sparse mountain ranges in this western part of the Southern Domain, Meng Hao sat cross-legged inside of a freshly carved out Immortal’s Cave. He consumed medicinal pills and rotated his Cultivation base as he treated his injuries.

Time passed slowly. Soon, a month had gone by. During that time, Meng Hao didn’t step half a pace outside of the Immortal’s Cave. He was focused completely on treating his injuries. The Immortal’s Cave he was in was in a remote location. Considering that few people inhabited this western area, as well as the mists that covered the land, it was very

peaceful.

Finally one day, Meng Hao's eyes opened. His face was no longer pale, and his body was now mostly recovered.

"Azure-masked Cultivator!" Meng Hao's eyes glowed with a cold aura. This was the first time he had been injured in five years, and the injury had been quite severe. Were it not for the Violet Pupil Transformation increasing his healing abilities, then he would not have lasted long enough to carve out this Immortal's Cave.

Furthermore, were he not an alchemist, equipped with a variety of medicinal pills, he wouldn't have been able to last through the month.

After all, he had been injured by a Core Formation expert who could wield Core Qi!

If the Core Formation expert had faced any Foundation Establishment Cultivator other than Meng Hao, that person would never have been able to flee, and would certainly have been defeated.

Meng Hao took a deep breath. His expression was grim as he produced a pill furnace and some medicinal pills, and then began to concoct. His injury was not completely healed. There was still frigid Qi within his body.

Meng Hao began to concoct a medicinal pill specifically designed for his current circumstances.

A few more months passed. Three days after Meng Hao consumed his specially designed medicinal pill, his eyes suddenly opened. He then spat out the last of the frigid Qi from within his body. It scattered about the Immortal's Cave, causing frost to appear, which then turned into ice.

After a long moment passed, the cave began to return to normal.

If that azure-masked Cultivator was here to observe the scene, he wouldn't be able to believe his eyes. He had complete faith that no Foundation Establishment Cultivator could survive the frigid power of the Ten Flood Dragons. However... Meng Hao had obviously recovered from his injuries.

He took a deep breath, and killing intent grew strong in his eyes. He sat there thoughtfully for a while, and then determination grew in his eyes. He smacked his bag of holding to produce the pill furnace once again.

He held it in his hand, lost in thought.

“I need to concoct a batch of pills that will help me to surge ahead. I need a medicinal pill that will without fail produce a Dao Pillar, something that exceeds Foundation Establishment Day, and will cause my Cultivation base to soar.” A deeply thoughtful look appeared in his eyes. In his mind, countless pill formulas appeared. Finally, he decided on a formula for a pill known as Stage Charging Pill.

“This pill can be used with the Three Mortalities Pill in order to break through from the Foundation Establishment Stage into the Core Formation stage!”

After thinking for a while longer, his eyes filled with decisiveness. He immediately produced a large amount of medicinal plants from his bag of holding and began to concoct the Stage Charging Pill. He focused his complete attention on the concoction process. Several days passed. Even while using the Alchemy Dao Transmutation Incantation, he failed several times. It wasn't until the seventeenth day that he was able to successfully concoct the pill.¹

When it appeared, a medicinal aroma emanated out, filling the Immortal's Cave. If Meng Hao hadn't already made special preparations to prevent the aroma from seeping out of the Immortal's Cave, it could very well have attracted unwanted attention.

Holding the pill in hand, his eyes glittered. He took out the copper mirror and an accumulation of Spirit Stones, then began to duplicate.

One Stage Charging Pill after another appeared, which Meng Hao all placed into pill bottles. Soon, ten full pill bottles were arranged neatly in front of him. He spit out the lightning mist, and sent the wooden swords circling around him. In addition, he activated the Furnace Lord medallion. Having made all of these preparations, he took a deep breath, picked up a Stage Charging Pill, and placed it into his mouth.

His seventh Dao pillar was already eighty percent complete. When he placed the pill into his mouth, it transformed into spiritual power which immediately caused his entire body to tremble. The seventh Dao Pillar began to emanate a purple glow, and became even more solid.

“Press on to the finish!” he thought, his eyes shining with determination. He then closed his eyes and began to meditate.

Time passed slowly. A month later, Meng Hao’s body began to tremble and wither up. He calmly produced a large handful of medicinal pills and began to put them in his mouth one after another.

Seven more days passed. A roaring filled his body, and a purple glow emanated out brightly, filling the entire Immortal’s Cave. The seventh Dao Pillar had fully appeared!

As soon as it did, Meng Hao’s Cultivation base shot upward. His Spiritual Sense grew stronger, and his battle prowess more formidable. His entire person was like an unsheathed sword, incomparably dangerous.

Now, he was no longer in the mid Foundation Establishment stage, but rather the late Foundation Establishment stage!

Even someone with a Flawless Foundation would not be able to give rise to the slightest bit of struggle against the suppressive pressure he could emit. As of now, he was without a doubt the number one person in the entire Foundation Establishment stage!

However, Meng Hao wasn’t content. Being matchless in the Foundation Establishment stage wasn’t something he had looked forward to. He wanted to fight that azure-masked Cultivator! To do that, his current Cultivation base simply wasn’t sufficient!

A bright glow filled his eyes, and he took another deep breath. He retrieved a vast amount of Spirit Stones and began to duplicate medicinal pills. These Spirit Stones included his profits from selling pills in the East Pill Division, as well as what had been gifted to him by the Black Sieve Sect, plus what he had received during his travels with Zhou Dekun as. It was quite an amount, but every time Meng Hao looked at it, it didn’t seem enough for him.

However, if he truly wanted to go the distance today, then he would have to ignore the pain and use them to duplicate medicinal pills. The cultivation he was about to practice was something that no one in the Southern Domain had ever seen before.

Even Dao Children would not be able to squander medicinal pills in the way that Meng Hao was right now!

Time passed. One month, two months, three months....

Meng Hao lost track of the passage of time in his Immortal's Cave. As he cultivated, his eighth Dao Pillar slowly became visible.

Ten percent, twenty percent, thirty percent.... After half a year, his eighth Dao Pillar was now eighty percent complete.

Meanwhile, outside in the Southern Domain, a violent windstorm of a commotion had arisen.

This storm came from the Black Lands!

Black Lands Cultivators were making incursions into the Southern Domain!!

More than seventy alchemists mysteriously disappeared!

These two events caused a huge commotion in the Southern Domain. The missing alchemists were mostly from the East Pill and World Pill Divisions, although other scattered alchemists were also involved. This unforeseen misfortune caused the fury of the Violet Fate Sect and the Golden Frost Sect to rise to the heavens.

These two Sects were the first to take action. Mysterious Patriarchs from both Sects immediately traveled to the Black Lands. According to the rumors, Grandmasters Pill Demon and Eternal Mountain both secretly made the trip themselves.

The Black Lands had existed for many years, and was a brutal place, but there was little the Southern Domain could do about it. The details of the affair between the two powers were not made public. The only thing that people knew was that the Golden Frost Sect and the Violet Fate Sect

managed to bring back all of their alchemists, with the exception of a Furnace Lord named Zhou Dekun. After the incident, neither Sect brought up the Black Lands ever again.

As for the Black Lands, they laid down the flag and stilled the drums, so to speak. Everything seemed to go back to normal in the Southern Domain. No more alchemists went missing, and as for what was happening in the Black Lands, no one knew.

After half a year in which the Black Lands' aggressiveness had been reigned in, a Dao Geyser appeared not far away from the Ancient Dao Lake, in the western part of the Southern Domain.

Within the fountain of water that shot up from the geyser, an illusory image could be seen. It was an image from ancient times, of a Foundation Establishment Cultivator breaking through into the Core Formation stage.

The appearance of the geyser immediately caused a huge stir among the great Sects and Clans of the Southern Domain. Veteran old timers from the various Sect went to inspect the geyser, then left. Afterward, Chosen disciples of the Foundation Establishment stage, as well as Dao Children, were dispatched to continue observation of the geyser.

A message was sent out by a late Nascent Soul Stage Patriarch from the Solitary Sword Sect:

"This geyser contains enlightenment. Gain this enlightenment, and you might enter Core Formation. It is not suitable for us, but rather for you Foundation Establishment Cultivators."

These words caused a huge commotion among all of the Foundation Establishment Chosen within the Southern Domain. From all areas, they began to flock to the western region of the Southern Domain. A month later, Zhou Jie, Dao Child from the Black Sieve Sect, made a breakthrough next to the Dao Geyser, and entered Core Formation. He formed a Green Core, astonishing everyone.

1. Meng Hao learned the Alchemy Dao Transmutation Incantation in chapter 242.

Chapter 264: A Shout Like a Clap of Thunder

After Zhou Jie of the Black Sieve Sect reached Core Formation because of the ancient Dao Geyser, a long-lasting storm wind kicked up among the Foundation Establishment Cultivators of the Southern Domain.

It swept across the great Sects and Clans, causing all disciples of the Foundation Establishment stage to rush to the western region of the Southern Domain.

Now, the western region, which previously contained hardly the trace of a person, quickly became a convergence of Chosen. Of course, friction immediately broke out. For months, there were countless battles. Whoever came out on the top of such battles would instantly become famous.

Spontaneous conventions such as this rarely occurred in the Southern Domain. It was not often for there to be such an assemblage of Chosen, all gathered together in one place and contending for supremacy.

That was exactly what was happening now, though, thanks to the appearance of the ancient Dao Geyser!

The geyser erupted on a monthly basis. Furthermore, there was limited space in which to properly observe it. As such, it was common for magical battle to erupt.

In the second month after the appearance of the ancient Dao Geyser, Conclave Disciple Xu Qing of the Black Sieve Sect defeated Li Clan Dao Child Li Daoyi 1, which rocked the entire western region.

Before the battle, few knew the name of Xu Qing. Afterwards, though, it spread far and wide.

In the fourth month, Dao Child of the Wang Clan, the one who had been rumored to have died all those years ago, Wang Lihai, along with Han Shandao 2, one of the Seven Sons of the Solitary Sword Sect, both gained the enlightenment of the ancient Dao Geyser. Although they didn't have breakthroughs, their Cultivation bases experienced significant

growth. According to the rumor, both of them received enlightenment regarding a certain magical technique.

In the fifth month, Dao Child of the Song Clan, Song Yunshu 3, battled Chen Fan, another of the Seven Sons of the Solitary Sword Clan. In the end, they were evenly matched; however, because of the battle, Chen Fan's reputation grew rapidly.

During the same month, Dao Child of the Blood Demon Clan, Li Shiqi 4, fought heroine Shan Ling 5 of the Solitary Sword Sect. The explosions caused by the battle filled the area, and did not end with victory or defeat, but rather, with both parties gaining the enlightenment of the Dao Geyser.

In the sixth month, friction arose between the Golden Frost Sect's Dao Child, and Wang Youcai 6, Chosen of the Blood Demon Sect. A bloody battle was fought, during which the Dao Child's arm was severed. This sent mighty waves of astonishment throughout the Southern Domain.

During the same month, Wang Tengfei, Chosen of the Wang Clan and younger brother of Wang Lihai, also achieved enlightenment. He made a breakthrough in his Cultivation base, reaching the great circle of Foundation Establishment. This also caused quite a stir.

By observing the tableau within the erupting geyser, and gaining the power of the enlightenment, one could gain something from nothing, and cause the Cultivation base to grow, without the use of any medicinal pills. It was an opportunity for incredible luck for anyone in the Foundation Establishment stage in the Southern Domain.

Because of the Dao Geyser, it was possible to suddenly break through from Foundation Establishment into Core Formation. The only thing that would be more incredible would be to break through from Core Formation into the Nascent Soul stage. One could imagine the struggles that would result from something like that.

In the blink of an eye, the western region of the Southern Domain was thrown into turmoil. It was only the Violet Fate Sect who didn't dispatch any disciples to the Dao Geyser. There were many speculations about this, and most people came to the conclusion that it had something to do with

the previous incident with the Black Lands.

The western region of the Southern Domain quickly became the focus of all attention. Not very far off from the location of the Dao Geyser, Meng Hao sat cross-legged in meditation.

His body was once again as withered as a corpse's. However boundless life force existed deep inside him. The sound of his heartbeat began to ring out, louder and louder.

His eighth Dao Pillar was now more than ninety percent complete. The critical juncture had arrived, and he had consumed roughly seventy to eighty percent of his medicinal pills. At the moment, over a hundred empty pill bottles were strewn about the Immortal's Cave.

Time slowly passed. Soon, half a month had gone by. Outside the Immortal's Cave, black clouds filled the sky, and a thin rain fell down. The curtains of rain made the outside world hazy. Suddenly, the peaceful rainy atmosphere was broken as two prismatic beams of light shot into the area.

Two young Cultivators approached, locked in magical combat. One was from the Solitary Sword Sect, another was from the Blood Demon Sect. The booming sounds caused by their magical techniques echoed out constantly. Both of these Cultivators were well-known in the world; they were Chosen of their respective Sects. And now here they were in the western region, fighting a bitter battle.

Booms echoed out, and shocking magical techniques were employed. They charged along, attacking, rocking the surroundings. Unbeknownst to them, they were nearing Meng Hao's isolated mountain. At a glance, it was obvious that the effects of their magical techniques were rippling out toward his mountain.

A massive boom sounded out, and within the Immortal's Cave, Meng Hao, his body withered like a corpse, suddenly opened his eyes. They flashed like lightning.

The instant they opened, his gaze blasted out, filled with a powerful, brilliant light. It was shocking, so much so that the mountain itself began to shake. Even the falling rain outside began to vibrate.

Moments ago, the two fighting Cultivators had only been worried about each other. All of a sudden, though, their hair stood on end, seemingly out of instinct. An indescribable sense of danger rose up, and their facial expressions immediately changed. Their Cultivation bases were suddenly suppressed, their bodies began to twitch, and their scalps grew numb. They felt as if death itself were staring down upon them, causing their hearts to pound.

Meng Hao's shrivelled lips suddenly opened. When he began to speak, the sound was a bit weak, but it instantly rose to frenzied heights, a shocking roar which filled the world outside the Immortal's cave. It slammed into the ears of the two Cultivators louder than thunder. It turned into their whole world, engulfing them, as if it were the only sound in the world.

"SCREW OFF!"

SCREW OFF...

...OFF....

...off....

...

The booming echoed back and forth in the surrounding five kilometer region, the lone mountain being the centre of it. It seemed this area was a forbidden zone.

The two Cultivator's minds reeled, and they immediately coughed up mouthfuls of blood. Their Cultivation bases were in the late Foundation Establishment stage; however, beneath the voice they had just heard, they seemed weak enough to fall at a single blow. Faces pale, scalps numb, expressions that of astonishment and panic, they retreated at top speed, using all the strength they possessed. It wasn't until they had fled fifty kilometres away that they finally looked back.

The rain fell down around them. Moments ago they had been in a life-and-death battle. However, at the moment, neither of them seemed to be in the mood for fighting. They glanced at each other, and they both

seemed to feel they had just barely avoided a disaster.

“Who... was that?”

“All the heroes of the Southern Domain have come to the western region, a multitude of Dao Children and Chosen. I’m not sure who this guy is, but the feeling he gives is even more terrifying than the feeling I get from Elder Sister Shan Ling or Elder Brother Han Shandao of my Solitary Sword Sect!”

“Same here. Even facing up against Elder Sister Li wouldn’t be as frightening. I felt like I was a mortal....”

Seeing how they were both so shaken, they silently turned and sped off, each in a different direction.

Three days after they left, Meng Hao sat in the Immortal’s Cave. Suddenly, a violet light rose up from his body. It didn’t spread out of the Immortal’s Cave, which had been thoroughly sealed. However, the light caused the entire world of the Immortal’s Cave to turn violet.

The glow lasted for several hours, then slowly began to fade. There sat Meng Hao; he hadn’t moved for nearly half a year.

He no longer looked withered and weak; he was completely recovered. His eyes were closed. However, an explosive power seemed to be growing stronger within him.

He didn’t move, but looking at him, you would get the feeling that he was moving in a way that would shake the heavens and earth.

*

1. Li Daoyi is the Dao Child Meng Hao fought in the Blood Immortal Legacy tournament.
2. Han Shandao’s name in Chinese is 韩山道 hán shān dào – Han is a common surname. Shan means “mountain.” Dao means “way” or “path.” Same characters as “the Dao.”
3. Song Yunshu was introduced when Meng Hao went to the Song Clan.

4. Meng Hao fought Li Shiqi right after he escaped from the Black Sieve Sect with Ultimate Vexation. He thought she was a guy at first.
5. Shan Ling was introduced in chapter 180. Actually the chapter was named after her.
6. Wang Youcai was one of the group originally taken by Xu Qing to the Reliance Sect.

Chapter 265: Out of Seclusion!

A long time passed, and slowly, the ferocious Qi emanating from Meng Hao's body faded. Finally, he opened his eyes. His pupils looked normal, but deep in their recesses was a shocking profundity. They were like deep pools of water, or an endlessly starry night sky.

Meng Hao took a long, deep breath. Within his body, his eight Dao Pillars glowed with a violet aura. They rotated, emitting spiritual power throughout his body which far, far outmatched his previous power.

"It's still not enough," he thought. "But it's the best I can do for now. Eight Dao Pillars. I don't have quite enough to pass the critical juncture for the final Dao Pillar." It wasn't that he didn't have enough medicinal pills. For some reason, he had the strange feeling that there was something about the ninth Dao Pillar that didn't have anything to do with medicinal pills.

He felt as if he were in a bottleneck, and that at some point he would reach a turning point. Once that turning point arrived, he wouldn't need any medicinal pills whatsoever. Instead, he would be able to rely on his eight Dao Pillars to create the ninth. Then he would have completed the great circle of Foundation Establishment.

He took a deep breath, and sat there thoughtfully for a long moment. Finally, he lifted his head and looked outside of the Immortal's Cave. It was still raining. The murmur of the rainfall filled the land. Everything looked dim and hazy.

His secluded meditation had lasted for a long time, and he had no idea of the events which had transpired during that better part of a year. He also had no idea whether or not Zhou Dekun had escaped with his life.

For the moment, Meng Hao chose not go out. His eyes shining, he looked down at his bag of holding and then produced a Spring and Autumn tree.

Having been in secluded meditation for more than half a year already, he didn't really care much about how much time had passed. Once he did go

out, he wanted to be prepared to make up for his previous defeat at the hands of the azure-masked Cultivator. With death!

Meng Hao took a deep breath. He lifted up the Spring and Autumn tree in his right hand. A blinding violet glow appeared in his palm. He employed the full, massive power of his eight Dao Pillars to begin the catalyzing process.

The violet light grew more and more intense, and the Spring and Autumn tree sucked it in. Soon, a second sprout appeared on its surface. At the same time, Meng Hao's left hand performed the incantation to brand the Spring and Autumn tree with the Time locking magic.

"Including the test I performed in the Black Sieve Sect, twenty years of time are now locked within this Spring and Autumn tree." He pulled out a jade box, within which was the Primordial Heavenly Replenishing Pill. He examined it closely, comparing it to the Spring and Autumn tree.

"Time is like a poison, a poison which can be used to refine treasures. It melts away life force...." Within Meng Hao's mind appeared the images of what had happened to Chen Jiaxi. After some time passed, he took a deep breath, and then once again picked up the Spring and Autumn tree and began to catalyze the Time within.

Time passed, ten days, in the blink of an eye. On this particular day, a look of concentration covered Meng Hao's face. The Spring and Autumn tree in his hand was now half gray. However, locked within was nearly fifty years of time. The further along he went, the more of his Cultivation base he had to use to perform the catalyzation, and the slower it went.

As of now, he was completing the last ten years of a sixty year cycle. When this catalyzation was completed, the Spring and Autumn tree would look completely different than it had before.

It was dusk, and the rain outside was still falling down in sheets. Meng Hao was completely focused on the Spring and Autumn tree. He continued catalyzing without pause. Suddenly, his expression flickered; the Spring and Autumn tree had begun to wither.

It seemed as if the tree couldn't handle the fifty years of time. Regardless

of what mystical properties the Spring and Autumn tree had, at this moment it was decaying. Soon, it turned into gray ash, which collapsed through Meng Hao's fingers.

An unsightly expression appeared on his face. He looked down at the ash, and then back at his right hand. His hand appeared to have aged as well. It wasn't fifty years, but obviously the failure just now had resulted in a recoil.

Ignoring his hand, Meng Hao began to think.

"No wonder treasures like this are so rare; forging the Time treasure is extremely complex. One failure can negate all the previous successes. It's possible to expend great cost, but then make a slight mistake in the very end. If that happens, all is for naught. Furthermore, every failure comes at the price of a Time recoil..." Meng Hao could clearly sense that the recoil just now had caused some of his life force to disappear.

"However, if there's anyone who can actually forge this treasure... then that person is me." His eyes began to glow brightly, and, muttering to himself, he slapped his right hand down onto his bag of holding to retrieve another Spring and Autumn tree. Once again, he began to catalyze it.

Time passed. By that night, the Spring and Autumn contained ten years of Time. Ten days later, Meng Hao had once again reached the point where fifty years of Time was locked within the Spring and Autumn tree.

He took a deep breath, and consumed some medicinal pills to restore his energy. Two hours later, he opened his eyes. He didn't begin to immediately catalyze the final ten years of time. Instead, he produced the copper mirror from within his bag of holding. He duplicated some medicinal pills, then used some of his remaining Spirit Stones to duplicate the Spring and Autumn tree with the fifty years of time locked inside.

It seemed that a full sixty year cycle of time was a watershed mark. Before reaching it, the duplication cost wouldn't be very high. However, after reaching the sixty year cycle, Meng Hao had the strong feeling that the duplication cost would increase tremendously.

A few moments later, a bang sounded out. An irritated look appeared on

Meng Hao's face as his entire right arm aged, and the Spring and Autumn tree once again crumbled into dust. He didn't have many Spirit Stones left, but he pushed down the sense of pain and used almost the entire remaining amount to produce another copy, which he then began to catalyze.

This catalyzation lasted a full two days before the Spring and Autumn tree turned gray. After sealing it with the Time locking magic, the tree began to emit an archaic sense of Time.

He had finally succeeded in embodying the Spring and Autumn tree with a full sixty year cycle!

Meng Hao began to pant as he looked at the Spring and Autumn tree. His eyes began to shine. He could sense that the Spring and Autumn tree contained a feeling of Time similar to the Primordial Heavenly Replenishing Pill! It was much, much weaker, but it was definitely there.

"Sadly, I don't have enough Spirit Stones. In the future, this treasure will definitely require a lot of them. A Time treasure with a sixty year cycle of Time is considerably powerful, though. It's good enough for now!" His eyes flickering, he looked thoughtfully at the Spring and Autumn tree for a moment, then used his left hand to begin to whittle it.

A few moments later, Meng Hao was holding a simple wooden sword. Its appearance was crude, but this crude wooden sword was a magical treasure that Meng Hao had created himself.

He looked at the Wooden Time Sword for a moment, then put it into his bag of holding. Next, he produced some jade bottles. Each of these bottles contained blood; they were none other than the three generations of ancestral blood that he had collected from the Black Sieve Sect when concocting the Soul Refining Pills.

"I concocted pills for thirteen generations of the Black Sieve Sect, and of them, was able to collect five sets of ancestral blood from three generations.... From this blood, I should be able to create five rudimentary Blood Clones." Within his mind he could see the description of Blood Clones which was contained in the Blood Immortal legacy.

“Blood Clones are like shadows. Meld the self into the shadow, and it becomes like a doppelgänger, its life and death tied to my thoughts. A Blood Clone contains twenty to thirty percent of the power of the Cultivation base of my true self. If I can upgrade it to a Blood Spirit, it can employ one hundred percent of my true self’s Cultivation base. The final version, which is created with nine generations of ancestral blood, is a Blood Divinity, which is a defiance of the Heavens!” The legacy of the Blood Immortal was truly sinister! Early on, he had had his doubts. However after all his years in the Cultivation World, and after studying the Dao of alchemy and the Dao of poison, he now had a much better understanding.

“Much like poison, there are thousands of types of magic. The Great Dao is limitless, filled with paths which may be trodden according to one’s will and one’s own decisions.” He lifted his right hand and, according to the method described in the Blood Immortal legacy, began to create his Blood Clones.

This technique used one’s own blood as the spirit, and the three generations of ancestral blood to bolster it. Furthermore, a sacrificial object was also necessary. According to the Blood Immortal legacy, this sacrificial object was of utmost importance. Of course, there are myriad objects in Heaven and Earth. Plants and trees, rocks and earth, anything could be used. In fact, the ancient Blood Immortal even used the skin of his enemies as the sacrificial object.

As long as the sacrificial object was not destroyed, the Blood Clone could not be destroyed. The greater the fusion between the two, the more power could be manifested by the Blood Clone’s Cultivation base.

After thinking for a moment, Meng Hao decided that the sacrificial item he would use would be the meat jelly’s shed skin!

When the meat jelly had shed, it had left behind plenty of residual skin which Meng Hao had collected. Meng Hao retrieved five pieces the size of a fingernail, and then began to use them to refine the Blood Clones.

Time passed by slowly. Soon, three months had gone by....

The Dao Geyser in the western region of the Southern Domain eventually increased its rate of eruption from once per month to every three days. Soon, the interval grew shorter; every two days, and then every day. Eventually, it was erupting multiple times per day, with no end in sight!

According to the ancient records of the Sects of the Southern Domain, continuous eruptions would go on for seven days, and then the geyser would disappear.

Time was running out. The Chosen of the great Sects and Clans spent all their time and focus on trying to gain enlightenment, vying for a chance to receive luck at the critical moment.

One day, Blood Demon Sect Dao Child Li Shiqi gained enlightenment and made a breakthrough, reaching Core Formation. Spiritual energy poured out of the geyser, absorbable only by her. No one else dared to steal away even a scrap.

After her was Dao Child of the Li Clan, Li Daoyi, the very same one who had been defeated but not killed by Xu Qing. His name immediately spread throughout the Southern Domain as the third Cultivator to break through to Core Formation. Again, the spiritual energy which poured out of the Dao Geyser could only be absorbed by him, the one who had gained enlightenment.

The Southern Domain was in full commotion.

It was during this period of time that Meng Hao finally left his secluded meditation, after nearly a year. He stepped out, his hair long, his right hand somewhat withered. He no longer wore the clothing of a Violet Fate Sect Furnace Lord, but instead an azure robe.

It was a rainy morning when he emerged. He immediately transformed into a beam of prismatic light that shot off into the distance.

His expression was placid, but his eyes seemed to contain the profundity of the stars.

His Cultivation base was still in the Foundation Establishment stage, but

his battle prowess was no longer on the same level as Foundation Establishment Cultivators. As for exactly how much more powerful....

Meng Hao wanted to find out for himself!

Therefore, he would go to battle!

By battle, he would gain enlightenment of Heaven and Earth. By battle, he would gain enlightenment regarding his ninth Dao Pillar. By battle... he would shock the world!

He would seek out that turning point which would lead to a breakthrough in his Cultivation base!

Chapter 266: The Faceless Azure Hero!

Seven days later, massive, figurative storm winds buffeted the Southern Domain. The hearts of each and every Southern Domain Cultivator in the western region was completely shaken.

All of this was because of one name.

The Faceless Azure Hero!

According to the rumors, he wore a long, azure-colored robe, and his face was nothing but a blur.

According to the rumors, he was only in the late Foundation Establishment stage, but his battle prowess was incredible, something rarely seen.

According to the rumors, whenever he attacked, he would only say one thing:

“Fight!”

The rumors had begun to spread immediately after his first battle, seven days before. He had fought a Chosen of the Golden Frost Sect, who was of the great circle of late Foundation Establishment. They had met each other flying in mid air, and for no apparent reason, the words “fight” had been uttered, whereupon a boom filled the sky.

In an instant, the Golden Frost Sect Chosen was defeated. It happened in the blink of an eye, as if the man were dry weeds or rotten wood, just waiting to be crushed.

Many people saw the fight. It was incredibly shocking, but before they could even spread the news, they witnessed the Faceless Azure Hero’s second battle.

His opponent was a Chosen of the Blood Demon Sect. Again, the Chosen was defeated in an instant!

Their lives were spared. However, such decisive defeats were like massive floodwaters that could smash away one’s self-confidence, and left

each opponent at a complete loss.

In the following days, the Li Clan, the Black Sieve Sect, the Song Clan, the Solitary Sword Sect, the Wang Clan... all the grand Sects and Clans saw similar fates befall their Chosen disciples. Anyone who met the man in the azure robe would never even have a chance to make two attacks. They were all instantly defeated.

The western region of the Southern Domain was in an uproar as everyone began to speculate regarding the identity of this faceless, azure-robed man. Opinions were widely varied.

On the eighth day, roughly fifteen hundred kilometers away from the Dao Geyser, where the Solitary Sword Sect disciples were gathered together, an azure-robed form flitted about in mid-air. Up ahead was a middle-aged man with a flushed face. His eyes shone brightly as he stared at the azure-robed man in front of him.

“Just who exactly are you?!”

The azure-robed man was naturally none other than Meng Hao.

For the past several days he had been constantly fighting, all in an attempt to gain battle enlightenment regarding his ninth Dao pillar. He had heard of the Dao Geyser, of course, as well as of the people who had reached Core Formation.

However, he didn't immediately go to the Dao Geyser. Instead, he continued to issue challenges to the heroes of the Southern Domain. After days of facing off against multiple opponents, and achieving victory after victory, he now had his sights set on the Dao children of the various Sects and Clans.

The middle-aged man in front of him was none other than the First of the Seven Sons of the Solitary Sword Sect, Han Shandao, of the great circle of Foundation Establishment, half way to Core Formation!

“Fight? Or not?” asked Meng Hao, his voice cool.

Han Shandao's eyes shone brightly. Lifting his head to the sky, he laughed heartily, then rose his right hand, sending his massive greatsword

screaming out. The sword aura shone up to the heavens as it shot toward Meng Hao. A light smile touched the corners of Meng Hao's lips, and he advanced forward a step.

A massive boom filled the air, and at the same time....

Blood sprayed from Han Shandao's mouth as he tumbled backward through the air. Astonishment filled his face. His greatsword had begun to crumble into pieces. Hidden inside was a flying dagger which could unleash the power of Core Formation. However, it too was shaking and covered with cracks, and flew backward along with Han Shandao.

One moment, one move, utter defeat!

A long slash stretched from Han Shandao's right shoulder all the way to his left armpit. Bone could be seen within the wound, and blood gurgled out from within. Han Shandao's face was pale as one of the other Solitary Sword Sect disciples helped him to his feet.

He took a deep breath and stood there on wobbly legs. "Your excellency has gained enlightenment regarding the ancient battle incantation contained in the Dao Geyser. I concede defeat."

Meng Hao didn't respond. He simply turned and left. During these eight days, he had battled many people. Quite a few of them brought up the matter of the Dao Geyser, and the ancient battle incantation.

After Meng Hao took his leave, the blurriness on his face changed. A moment later, he once again looked like Fang Mu. However, he still wore the azure robe. An hour later, Meng Hao looked out over a massive lake.

It was a lake, but it would be more proper to call it a Dao Geyser!

The lake was surrounded by quite an assembly of Cultivators, over ten thousand of them. They all sat cross-legged, seemingly deep in meditation.

Meng Hao's arrival didn't attract any attention whatsoever.

He looked around at the crowds, and then selected a spot with fewer people, where he sat down cross-legged and began to silently observe the Dao Geyser.

Time passed. On the second day, Meng Hao noticed that more and more Cultivators were arriving, from all directions. By midday, there were now several tens of thousands of people present.

By evening, the entire area was packed. There appeared to be nearly one hundred thousand Cultivators!

Suddenly, water shot up and then glowing lights appeared above the Dao Geyser. The lights interlocked to form a screen in the sky. Within the screen was the indistinct image of a person, sitting cross-legged in meditation, both hands flashing an incantation.

“It’s appeared!”

“What exactly is the enlightenment contained in the Dao Geyser? What the hell? I’ve been here for nearly a year, but my Cultivation base hasn’t made the slightest bit of progress.”

The voices of the surrounding Cultivators filled the air. Meng Hao looked up to examine the screen. As he did, the blurry image began to glow clearer, as did the man’s two hands. Meng Hao suddenly realized that the illusory image of the man was emanating killing intent!

The killing intent was faint, but Meng Hao was sure it was there, and that he was not the only person to notice it.

Murmuring to himself, he calmed his heart and forced himself into a state of tranquility. He stared at the figure on the screen, and gradually began to zone out everything else. He was in this state for an entire night. Early the next morning, he frowned. He had made no progress whatsoever.

Even as he sat there thoughtfully, an eager voice came to him from off to the side. “Hey, Fellow Daoist, check this out.” It was a middle-aged man, gaunt, but with bright eyes. His entire person seemed to radiate shrewdness.

Meng Hao had noticed him earlier. He had been making his way through the crowds surrounding the Dao Geyser, peddling books from out of his bag of holding. Few people seemed interested in buying, though, and the vast majority seemed to find him extremely annoying.

The man was discreet, though, and as soon as he sensed he wasn't wanted, would smile and take his leave.

He stood next to Meng Hao, his expression one of eagerness. With an ingratiating bow toward Meng Hao, he bowed from the waist and hurriedly began to speak.

"Fellow Daoist, are you worried because you haven't gained the enlightenment of the Dao Geyser?" His voice was filled with infectious enthusiasm. "Have you encountered a mountain of treasure, but aren't really sure what to do with it?"

Meng Hao stared at the man, taken aback.

"Don't worry a bit," continued the man, his eyes shining brightly. "You are about to gaze upon the Exalted Lord's Limitless Ancient Dao Geyser Enlightenment primer!" He slapped his bag of holding and immediately a faded pamphlet appeared in his hand.

"In this Exalted Lord's Limitless Ancient Dao Geyser Enlightenment primer, I have humbly recorded the enlightenment of countless Fellow Daoists. In fact, at no small cost, I even went to pay my respects to Celestial Goddess Xu Qing of the Black Sieve Sect, Celestial Goddess of the Blood Demon Sect Li Shiqi, as well as Dao Child of the Wang Clan, Wang Lihai. All of their enlightenment is contained therein. It also contains the knowledge of more than one hundred Chosen from various Sects. It was with copious blood, sweat and tears that I produced this Exalted Lord's Limitless Enlightenment primer!" The man spoke very quickly, holding the book in one hand and making various gestures with the other. Meng Hao stared in shock.

"Fellow Daoist, I know what you're thinking. The value of a book such as the Exalted Lord's Limitless Ancient Enlightenment primer is impossible to determine. It's priceless, right?" He slapped his thigh, as if forcing himself to make a decision.

"Fellow Daoist, you can rest assured. The cost to acquire this Exalted Lord's Limitless Enlightenment primer is not one hundred thousand Spirit Stones. It is not ten thousand Spirit Stones. Nor is it one thousand Spirit

Stones. This book, which contains the enlightenment of over one hundred Chosen, as well as several Dao Children, which was compiled at the cost of countless blood, sweat and tears, this Exalted Lord's Limitless Enlightenment primer can be yours for only ninety-nine Spirit Stones!"

Meng Hao cleared his throat and was about to say something.

"Fellow Daoist, don't lose out on this opportunity! You have a chance now that will never return again. Listen, I'll tell you a secret." He looked around, then lowered his voice. "Have you heard of the Faceless Azure Hero? That's the famous, ruthless wanderer who has defeated countless Chosen, all in the blink of an eye. In fact, you might not have heard that just a few days ago, he fought with Han Shandao of the Solitary Sword Sect, and Han Shandao was defeated decisively!

"Fellow Daoist, listen. Just half a month ago, the Faceless Azure Hero purchased one of my Exalted Lord's Limitless Enlightenment primers!"

Meng Hao frowned as he took another look at the middle-aged man.

"Okay, okay. How about ten Spirit Stones? I'll sell you a copy for ten Spirit Stones. You're my first customer of the day, which makes us friends. I'm Xu Liushan, disciple of the Blood Demon Sect."

Meng Hao hesitated for a moment, and then said, "I only have three Spirit Stones." He promptly pulled out his final three Spirit Stones from his robe.

"Deal!" replied the middle-aged man, without a moment's hesitation. He immediately placed the Exalted Lord's Limitless Enlightenment primer into Meng Hao's hand, apparently fearing that Meng Hao might change his mind.

Meng Hao looked at the pamphlet with a wry smile. A sudden breeze passed by, flipping open the pamphlet. Meng Hao's eyes suddenly narrowed, and he handed the three Spirit Stones to Xu Liushan.

Xu Liushan quickly left, sighing and muttering to himself about how difficult it was to do business these days. Actually, the images in the booklet had been drawn by himself. He had been in the area of the ancient

Dao Geyser for quite some time. Each time the screen appeared, he would draw an image of it. After some time, he came up with the idea of selling it.

Meng Hao ignored Xu Liushan and began to leaf through the pamphlet. Each drawing seemed to be almost exactly the same. However, it wasn't long before a strange light began to gleam within Meng Hao's eyes. He lifted his head to look up at the image on the screen which hovered in the middle of the Dao Geyser.

"The images in this booklet all appear to be the same, but actually there is something different about each one...." Meng Hao studied the screen for some time, until finally it began to fade. The instant it was about to fade completely, a tremor ran through Meng Hao's body. He had seen what the difference was. Within the figure on the screen was... a strand of Qi!

The strand of Qi was constantly in motion. Therefore, each of the drawings was slightly different. The differences were so minute, however, that even Xu Liushan hadn't noticed.

Chapter 267: Black Lands Cultivators

A moment later, the screen completely faded. The surrounding Cultivators began to depart. Meng Hao remained, sitting cross-legged and staring out into the blank air, thinking.

Two days after the appearance of the Dao Geyser projection, in the evening, Meng Hao closed his eyes. When it was deep in the night, his body flickered, and he disappeared.

The Wang Clan Dao Child and Chosen, in fact anyone in whose veins ran the blood of the Wang Clan, were all congregated on a mountain not too far from the Dao Geyser.

This particular night was doomed to be anything but tranquil.

The moon hung high in the sky when Meng Hao appeared just outside the mountain. He glanced up at the Wang Clan banner fluttering in the wind at the top of the mountain, then shot up toward it.

“Who are you? You dare to charge into Wang Clan territory!?”

“This place is marked with the Wang Clan banner, your excellency, please halt!”

Voices rose up as eight figures flew out, shooting toward Meng Hao. In front of them appeared whistling sword Qi, which also shot directly at Meng Hao.

His face was calm as he flicked his right sleeve. Power exploded from his eight Perfect Dao Pillars. What appeared to be the simple flick of the sleeve was actually crushing pressure from his Cultivation base, which transformed into a gale force wind that spread out in all directions.

A boom filled the air, and the eight sword auras collapsed into pieces. The eight Cultivators' faces filled with shock as they tumbled backward, mouths spewing blood.

They couldn't even cause Meng Hao to pause. He passed through their midst, continuing on toward the top of the mountain. It was at this time that ten beams of prismatic light flew out. Behind them were nearly a

hundred people, a massive group, all heading straight for Meng Hao.

“You dare to charge into Wang Clan territory!? It doesn’t matter what Sect you’re from, we’re gonna bury you here today!”

“What’s the point of being so long winded, kill this guy!”

As the group of people approached, magical lights began to shine up. Even people far away would be able to see the shocking glow which filled the night sky.

Meng Hao’s expression was calm. He lifted his right hand, slicing his finger. He catalyzed the blood with the power of his Dao Pillar; everything turned red and began to rumble. It grew into something that looked like a massive Blood Dragon; a roar filled the air as it blasted forward directly into the charging Wang Clan Cultivators. Their faces filled with shock and blood sprayed from their mouths. They spun backward head over heels, seemingly completely out of control.

A path now led to the top of the mountain, a path carved out by the Blood Dragon. Amidst thunderous roars, Meng Hao advanced, and within the space of about ten breaths, stood at the peak of the mountain.

Behind him, the Chosen of the Wang Clan coughed up blood. During his entire way up the mountain, no one had been able to do anything to block Meng Hao’s way.

“The Faceless Azure Hero!” people cried amidst their gasps. The Wang Clansmen surrounded the mountain peak, all of them staring at Meng Hao.

In front of Meng Hao was a Cultivator wearing a black robe and a grim expression. He appeared to be about thirty years of age, and his eyes shone with a profound gleam as he looked at Meng Hao. This was none other than Wang Lihai, Dao Child of the Wang Clan.

His Cultivation base was halfway to Core Formation. His presence made it seem as if there were another mountain peak on his mountain.

“Sir, I have come here today to fight the Wang Clan Dao Child!” said Meng Hao. His cool voice rang out in a tone that could sever nails and

slice iron.

“You want to fight? Then let’s fight!” Wang Lihai’s eyes glittered, and he took a step forward, lifting his hand at the same time. Behind him, an image appeared that seemed to contain both a sea of stars and the yellow springs of the underworld. Three finger attacks shot toward Meng Hao.

The first finger seemed capable of transforming life into the death. The second embodied killing intent that seemed to stem from the yellow springs. The third contained the silence of extermination, making the world seem empty.

These three finger attacks were a magical technique of the Wang Clan, the Vermillion Bird Three Fingers.

Wang Lihai was well aware that this Faceless Azure Hero was unfathomable. Therefore, he attacked him without the slightest bit of contempt, and led with his most powerful magical technique.

Meng Hao’s eyes glowed brightly. He strode forward, also lifting up his right hand, immediately attacking with one of the three Blood Immortal techniques, the Blood Finger.

A boom rattled out, causing everything to rumble. At the same time, a massive wind sprang up as Meng Hao’s body turned into a beam of light that shot up into the air.

All eyes on the mountain peak were fixed on Wang Lihai. His expression was the same as ever as he watch Meng Hao disappear. After a long moment, he coughed up a mouthful of blood, and then staggered backward a few paces. His index finger was quivering, and was so swollen he couldn’t bend it.

“Defeated,” he murmured. The other Wang Clansmen heard the words, looks of astonishment covered their faces.

Wang Lihai wasn’t the only one to be defeated that night. Song Yunshu, Dao Child of the Song Clan, as well as the Dao Child of the Golden Frost Sect were also vanquished!

As Meng Hao flew away from the Song Clan airship, Song Yunshu

leaned up against the wall, blood dripping down onto the ground. His face was pale as he stared at Meng Hao's disappearing shadow. Eventually, a stubborn look appeared on his face.

Outside the valley occupied by the Golden Frost Sect, a shocking roar filled the dawn air. It echoed out all but once, and then the Golden Frost Sect Dao Child was defeated. He immediately went into secluded meditation. Only a few people witnessed the shocking battle.

The next day, the name of the Faceless Azure Hero swept across the western region of the Southern Domain. There was not a single person who hadn't heard that he had defeated not only Chosen from the various Sects, but Solitary Sword Sect Dao Child Han Shandao, Wang Clan Dao Child Wang Lihai, Song Clan Dao Child Song Yunshu, and the Dao Child of the Golden Frost Sect!

In just a few days, the Faceless Azure Hero had risen to prominence in the western region of the Southern Domain.

In fact, some people had already taken him to be on par with Zhou Jie, Li Shiqi and Li Daoyi, who had all broken through to Core Formation.

Many people believed that the mysterious azure-robed man would continue to challenge more Dao Children, or perhaps even Li Shiqi and the others. Shockingly, however, after the three successive battles, he suddenly went into hiding.

At the moment, the illustrious azure-robed man was actually sitting cross-legged near the Dao Geyser, staring at the screen, and the figure on it, lost in thought.

After sensing the Qi in the image on the screen, he had gone to fight the three battles in the night. However, fighting them did nothing. He had the feeling that if he was able to gain enlightenment regarding the Qi in the figure, then he would be able to create his ninth Dao Pillar.

Meng Hao didn't know what the Qi was, but after the image disappeared this time, he was able to sense that his own body... also had a similar strand of Qi within it.

After observing the screen and the figure, he was able to circulate the Qi strand. When evening fell, he once again stood up.

For two days, Meng Hao was unable to find an appropriate opponent. Li Daoyi, Zhou Jie and Li Shiqi had apparently all left the western region of the Southern Domain. Meng Hao couldn't find them.

Eventually, he returned to the Dao Geyser to once again observe the screen. Eventually, he closed his eyes and began to mentally review his various victories over the Chosen and Dao Children.

Gradually, the images of the various opponents grew clearer in his mind, and he realized that they had a similar Qi strand within them. Within some, it was thick, others, thinner. But they existed in all of them.

Early on the second day, Meng Hao opened his eyes to glance about at the tens of thousands of people surrounding the Dao Geyser. After observing them for a while, he could tell that all of them had this mysterious Qi within them.

It seemed to appear within anyone who observed the Dao Geyser.

Meng Hao sat there thoughtfully for some time, his brow furrowed.

In the following half month, the reputation of the azure-robed man only continued to grow. Everyone spoke about him with fear. He seemed to have gone crazy! The instant he encountered a Cultivator of the late Foundation Establishment stage, he would instantly attack them, regardless of who they were or which Sect they belonged to.

The entire time, he never killed anyone. At the same time, no one was capable of making even two attacks against him. Everyone suffered complete defeat.

All of the Chosen from the Solitary Sword Sect who were present in the western region, were defeated. The same went for the Chosen of the Golden Frost Sect. As soon as anyone saw the azure-colored robe, their face would fill with fear. Regardless of whether it be Wang Clan, Li Clan or Song Clan, during this half month, everyone suffered defeat at the hands of the azure-robed man.

It was as if an azure-colored storm had descended upon the entirety of the western region of the Southern Domain.

Half a month later, the Dao Geyser was reaching its final moments. As of now, the screen had appeared, and wasn't disappearing. According to the ancient records, this meant that the Dao Geyser would dry up and disappear in seven days.

More and more Cultivators sat cross-legged near the Dao Geyser, staring at the screen. It was at this exact same time that the challenges issued by the azure-robed man ceased.

Meng Hao once again sat cross-legged near the Dao Geyser, looking at the figure on the screen. His eyes were bright. During the half month, his every victory had caused the Qi strand to grow.

He was able to make the frequency of rotation of the Qi strand within his body match that of the figure on the screen.

Meng Hao then noticed that the Qi strand of the figure was rotating faster and faster, building up an attack momentum that seemed just on the verge of exploding out.

"This is a strand of battle Qi which can be cultivated after constantly winning successive battles. It can be used to break through a bottleneck, and increase the Cultivation base! This is the supposed ancient battle incantation." He took a deep breath, then began to rotate the Qi strand within him. He was just a hair away from being able to create his ninth Dao Pillar, and yet, was unable to make that final charge.

Time passed. It was now the fifth day of the Dao Geyser's final seven days of eruption. Suddenly, several beams of prismatic light appeared in the air.

The beams were filled with black-robed figures, all of whom wore masks. Shockingly, three of them wore azure-colored masks. Seven or eight wore white masks.

There were two, a man and a woman, who took the lead, and they wore gold-colored masks!

The dozen or so people whistled through air toward the Dao Geyser, immediately catching the attention of the tens of thousands of Cultivators below.

Immediately, some of the people recognized the black robes and the masks. “Black Lands Cultivators!”

Meng Hao also looked up. His gaze fell upon one of the azure-masked Cultivators, a skinny man who stood off to the side.

In that instant, Meng Hao’s eyes began to glow.

Chapter 268: The Height of the Heavens and the Depth of the Earth

This azure-masked Cultivator was the same Core Formation expert who had attempted to kill him that day not long ago.

“I’ve already run out of people to fight here,” thought Meng Hao. “This guy... is definitely my next opponent!” The glittering in his eyes soon subsided. He took a deep breath and closed his eyes, meditating and rotating his Cultivation base, ensuring that he was at the peak of his ability.

Now that he had decided to fight, he was extremely calm.

Regardless of whether he won or lost, he must attack! This battle would be the final step in his enlightenment!

The instant he closed his eyes, the people from the Black Lands arrived, attracting the attention of almost all the surrounding Cultivators.

Zhou Jie and the others who had reached Core Formation were not present. However, Wang Lihai and Han Shandao, as well as all the other Dao Children and Chosen of the other Sects, were all there.

Among the tens of thousands of Cultivators near the Dao Geyser, there were many who recognized the two in the gold masks.

“Those two in the gold-colored masks... they’re Dao Children who have risen to prominence in the last year in the Black Lands!

“Black Lands Dao Children Luo Chong and Xu Fei!” 1

“That must be them. Only they would be wearing gold-colored masks!”

The discussions spread, and soon all eyes came to rest on the two Black Lands Dao Children. In the past year, stories about them had spread into the Southern Domain, making them quite well known. They were half way to Core Formation, and according to rumor, might increase their Cultivation bases at any time.

“The three in the azure masks behind them must be the Black Lands

Three Azures. All three have Cultivation bases at the Core Formation stage. Even more shocking is their Core Qi.... They say that a lot of alchemists were captured by them.”

“Core Formation Cultivators who have Core Qi are not to be trifled with....”

Wang Lihai frowned as he looked at the group of people from the Black Lands. Not far off, Han Shandao of the Solitary Sword Sect didn't look very pleased. This was especially so as he looked at the Black Lands Dao Children.

Song Yunshu stood wordlessly in the crowd, his face grim.

The two gold-masked Dao Children from the Black Lands peered down at the crowds. One of them spoke. His voice was soft at first, but then rapidly escalated into a roar like thunder. “I, Luo Chong from the Black Lands, wish to challenge the Southern Domain's heroic Dao Children to a duel!”

Immediately, the black-robed, white-masked Cultivators moved backward.

The three azure-masked Cultivators' faces didn't change in the slightest. They hovered cross-legged in mid-air, paying no attention to what was happening.

The other gold-masked Black Lands Dao Child, Xu Fei, also spoke, in a voice much much softer than Luo Chong's, but which became icy cold as it entered the ears of the surrounding Cultivators. “I, Xu Fei from the Black Lands, also wish to challenge the Southern Domain's heroic Dao Children to a duel!”

Not a single of the tens of thousands of Cultivators surrounding the Dao Geyser said a word. They simply looked up at Luo Chong and Xu Fei, a variety of different thoughts running through their heads.

Luo Chong gave a cold harrumph. “Don't tell me that among the throngs of Southern Domain Cultivators, not one dares to fight with us?” His words rang out, filled with an intangible domineering aura that made

his challenge seem even more intense.

Suddenly, a cold snort filled the air. A beam of light shot up; this was not someone from one of the five Sects or three Clans. It was a Cultivator from some other Sect, with a Cultivation base of the great circle of Foundation Establishment. He shot directly toward Luo Chong.

Beneath his mask, the Black Lands Dao Child smiled. His body flickered as he advanced to meet the attack. As the man approached, he stretched out both arms; multiple ghost images sprang up, and suddenly, the illusory image of a huge cauldron appeared and shot forward.

A massive boom rang out. The Southern Domain Cultivator staggered backward, coughing up blood, his face pale. Luo Chong waved his sleeve and advanced further. More booms filled the air, for the space of a few breaths. Finally, a blood-curdling scream could be heard. Blood fountained out from the neck of the Southern Domain Cultivator. Only a thin strip of flesh connected it to the body as it tumbled to the ground.

Luo Chong slowly lifted his gore-covered right hand and wiped some blood onto his gold mask. The sight was terrifying.

“Fellow Daoist Wang Lihai. As Dao Child of the Wang Clan, do you dare to fight with me!?” Luo Chong cried. His eyes shone brightly beneath his mask as he looked toward the Wang Clan Cultivators, and Wang Lihai.

Wang Lihai lifted his head, and began to stride toward Luo Chong, his eyes glowing.

The instant he began to move, Han Shandao from the Solitary Sword Sect also rose to his feet, then flew into the air toward Black Lands Dao Child Xu Fei.

The appearance of the two of them caused quite a stir among the Southern Domain Cultivators. All eyes were fixed on them; this battle was a fight between four Dao children. Unless something unexpected happened, their names would rock the world, regardless of who gained victory.

The eyes of the Black Lands Dao Children, Luo Chong and Xu Fei,

glistened with concentration. They watched as Han Shandao and Wang Lihai approached. It seemed none of the four wanted to make the first move.

As far as Luo Chong and Xu Fei were concerned, this battle represented the pinnacle of the might of the Southern Domain. No one under Core Formation could possibly unleash greater power in battle than the great circle of Foundation Establishment.ten

Therefore, their eyes filled with concentration, and within their hearts burned the fiery desire for battle.

Everything was quiet as the crowds looked at the four Dao Children and waited for this pinnacle of battles to begin.

However even as everyone was paying rapt attention to these four, suddenly, someone among the throngs of cross-legged Cultivators slowly stood up.

He wore an azure scholar's robe, and as he rose, he flew up into the air. This was none other than Meng Hao.

His appearance caused looks of astonishment to appear on the faces of the tens of thousands of Cultivators who surrounded the Dao Geyser. It wasn't just them. The four Dao Children in mid-air stared at him in surprise.

Wang Lihai's eyes came to rest on Meng Hao's clothes. Seeing their azure color, his eyes narrowed, and the image of a person appeared in his mind.

Not far off, Han Shandao looked equally thoughtful as he stared at Meng Hao's clothes.

"Interesting," said Luo Chong with a smile. "This Fellow Daoist seems to have made his move a bit late. But he seems to have his mind made up. Fellow Daoist Wang, Fellow Daoist Han, would you permit me to first slay him?" As he looked at Meng Hao, he didn't seem to think much of him. He had seen pictures of all of the famous Chosen and Dao Children in the Southern Domain, and Meng Hao didn't look familiar to him at all. As

such, he came to the conclusion that he wasn't even worth paying attention to.

A Cultivator like this could be killed without a second thought by Luo Chong.

Without waiting for a response from Wang or Han, Luo Chong flicked his sleeve, turned, and headed directly toward Meng Hao.

"When Luo Chong attacks," he said with a laugh, "he leaves behind only fatal wounds, not injuries. You deserve praise for your courage, so I'll leave your body intact." Seeing all this happen, the surrounding tens of thousands of Cultivators frowned.

To them, Meng Hao's actions seemed far too impulsive. If anything, it was simply delaying the amazing battle that was about to take place.

"Who is that? Does he really think he can join a battle of Dao Children?"

"He must think his Cultivation base is pretty amazing, so he wants to join the battle to earn some fame...."

As the discussions were beginning to spread, Luo Chong descended upon Meng Hao. As Meng Hao hovered there in mid-air, his cold voice suddenly rang out like rolling thunder, "You're no match for me," he said to Luo Chong. "The person I want to fight...." He suddenly pointed. "Is YOU!!"

This second 'you' was directed to none other than the skinny azure-masked Cultivator who was sitting cross-legged in mid-air off in the distance.

The instant the words came out, the skinny, azure-masked Cultivator's eyes snapped open. They glowed brightly as he looked at Meng Hao. His pupils constricted as he recognized him.

Meng Hao's words obviously caused an enormous buzz of conversation to rise up among the tens of thousands of Southern Domain Cultivators. Many immediately rose to their feet, looks of disbelief written across their faces.

“Is that guy insane? He wants to fight an azure-masked Cultivator from the Black Lands?!?!?”

“They’re in the Core Formation Stage, and have cultivated Core Qi. Who is that Cultivator? He looks like a scholar! Does he really dare to issue a challenge to a Core Formation Cultivator!?”

“Late Foundation Establishment fighting Core Formation. Hahaha! This isn’t something you see very often. This guy wants to be famous so badly, he’s willing to die for it!”

As the buzz of conversation filled the air, Wang Lihai’s eyes narrowed. Moments ago, he was unsure of Meng Hao’s identity. But now, he had no doubts whatsoever. He took a deep breath. He knew that this person was none other than the Faceless Azure Hero.

Only that mysterious azure-robed man qualified to look down on Foundation Establishment, and do something that since ancient times was rarely seen in the Cultivation world. He was turning everything upside down, issuing a challenge to the Core Formation stage while in the Foundation Establishment stage!

Han Shandao also took a deep breath. The exact same thoughts were going through his head as were going through Wang Lihai’s.

Luo Chong laughed loudly. “Southern Domain Cultivators really are very interesting. Apparently you aren’t familiar with the height of the Heavens and the depth of the Earth, and really have an exaggerated opinion of yourself! You are a trifling late Foundation Establishment stage Cultivator, not even of the great circle, and yet still dare to challenge a Black Lands azure-masked Cultivator.” An expression of ultimate ridicule covered his face beneath the mask. Before he even finished speaking, he lifted his right hand and waved it toward Meng Hao.

“I’ll leave your corpse intact,” said Luo Chong with a cold laugh. “Before you die, I’ll help you to understand the height of the Heavens, and the depth of the Earth!” Actually, his heart did not contain the contempt which filled his expression. He actually was taking the matter very seriously; he simply couldn’t believe that this guy was actually challenging

the Core Formation stage. In his opinion, he must be expecting to rely on some help. As he waved his sleeve, a bright beam shot out toward Meng Hao. Behind him, the massive, illusory cauldron reappeared and then also shot toward Meng Hao.

*

1. Luo Chong's name in Chinese is 罗冲 luó chōng – Luo is a surname which also means “sieve” or “net.” Chong means “charge” or “clash.” Xu Fei's name in Chinese is 徐菲 Xú fēi – Xu is a common surname which also means “gentle” or “slow.” Fei means “humble”.

Chapter 269: He's the Faceless Azure Hero!

"Pipe down!" said Meng Hao coolly, completely ignoring the incoming beam of light and the large cauldron. He slapped his bag of holding, and instantly, a simple wooden sword appeared.

Gripping the sword in his hand, he swiped it at the beam and the cauldron.

The slash of the sword seemed to split the very air, sending ripples out, as well as a bright white glow. The seemingly casual slash appeared to contain some Great Dao, as if great winds of Time were sweeping out through the ripples.

Within the approaching beam of light was a flying axe. Storm winds filled with a sixty-year cycle worth of Time slammed into the flying axe. Immediately, black spots appeared on its surface, as if it were aging. The spiritual power of the axe began to decay. Within the blink of an eye, it was so decayed that it seemed as if it would wither away. It immediately dropped down onto the ground.

The wind was still there; it rushed toward the illusory cauldron, which began to tremble and distort. A full sixty-year cycle worth of Time seemed to have passed. Something illusory like this could not withstand such a passage of Time. The previously seemingly impregnable cauldron suddenly began to dissipate.

The wind landed onto Black Lands Dao Child Luo Chong, gently brushing across him. The vitality in his skin seemed to be carried away by the wind. Wrinkles appeared on his hands, and beneath his mask, his face began to age. A sixty-year cycle worth of life force was suddenly sucked out of him. An indescribable feeling of weakness welled up inside. An unprecedented expression of fear covered his face; his body trembled and he coughed up a mouthful of blood. He staggered backward, a look of disbelief filling his eyes.

“You....” His body trembled, and his face went pale. His skin continued to wither, and his entire body became emaciated. The mask suddenly fell off, revealing that his once black hair was now white. His face was that of an old man, a face that still contained a trace of its former bravery, but was now mostly covered with shock and dread. Everything was deathly silent.

The three azure-masked Cultivators suddenly stood up, their eyes filled with serious expressions. On the ground, the tens of thousands of the Cultivators from the Southern Domain were silent for a moment. Then a massive hubbub broke out.

The other Dao Child, Xu Fei, subconsciously retreated a few steps, eyes filled with a look of dread as she looked at Meng Hao.

Wang Lihai and Han Shandao both took in deep breaths, staring in shock. Their hearts were pounding.

A divine ability like this was enough to shock everyone under Heaven. The entire time, Meng Hao, had only made one swipe with his sword!

The axe had been sent into a state of decay, the illusory cauldron had been dispelled, and Luo Chong had lost a sixty-year cycle of life. All of it gave rise to great waves of discussion.

“What... what magical technique was that?!?!”

“It was that sword! It must be a divine ability from that sword!!”

“No wonder he dares to challenge the Core Formation stage. Who is he...? He’s wearing azure-colored clothes. Don’t tell me....”

As the buzz of conversation filled the air, Dao Child Luo Chong stood there trembling, his face pale. His expression was one of thorough confusion.

Meng Hao flicked his sleeve and, his voice cool, said, “I’ve taken a sixty-year cycle of Time away from you. Now do you understand the height of the Heavens and the depth of the Earth?” With that, he ignored him, focusing his gaze on Wang Lihai and Han Shandao.

Wang Lihai looked at him and suddenly said, “It seems your excellency is

wearing his true face today. I understand that you thoroughly defeated me that day. However, there is still another fight to be had between us in the future!”

Han Shandao from the Solitary Sword Sect clasped hands and bowed. “Faceless Azure Hero.... Sir, I’m much obliged for your pointers before.”

Their words caused the surrounding Cultivators to instantly grow quiet. However, the silence only lasted for the space of a few breaths. Suddenly, a clamor arose which was loud enough to shake the land.

“What?! He’s the Faceless Azure Hero!”

“The Faceless Azure Hero! He’s made a sudden rise to prominence recently! He swept over Chosen and suppressed Dao Children. So, it’s him!!”

“I wonder what Sect the Faceless Azure Hero is from? Considering how incredible he is, he must be a Dao Child!”

As the noise of the clamor lifted up, everyone stared with burning eyes at Meng Hao. The Faceless Azure Hero’s reputation was just too incredible. It was a mystery that few people within the western region of the Southern Domain weren’t talking about.

Luo Chong gasped, and immediately retreated several paces. Before coming to the Southern Domain, he had heard of the Faceless Azure Hero, and had come to view him as a formidable adversary. How could he have ever imagined that the person in front of him was none other than that Faceless Azure Hero? His heart filled with bitterness as he realized that he was decisively defeated.

Considering that the defeat had been witnessed by tens of thousands of Cultivators, it was obvious that the word would quickly spread throughout the Southern Domain. Black Lands Dao Child Luo Cheng had lost a sixty-year cycle’s worth of Time in a single sword blow.

A fierce glow sprang up in Luo Chong’s eyes as he retreated. Suddenly, he cried out, “Azure-masked Elders, please kill this guy!” Suddenly, the eyes of the two other azure-masked Cultivators began to flicker with

killing intent.

Meng Hao's expression was the same as ever, without even the slightest change. The instant he made his decision to attack, he had anticipated that something like this would happen. Before the echo of Luo Chong's words could die out, Meng Hao's voice could be heard.

This time, he spoke to the surrounding tens of thousands of Cultivators.

"Fellow Daoists of the Southern Domain. I am Fang Mu, a simple Furnace Lord of the Violet Fate Sect. A year ago, Black Lands Cultivators ambushed me and my Fellow Furnace Lord Zhou Dekun in the Barren Mountains. I escaped by a fluke, but I'm not sure if Zhou Dekun made it out alive or not. Because of enlightenment from this Dao Geyser, my Cultivation base has reached new heights. Today, I come to battle my opponent from that day in the Barren Mountains. Fellow Daoists of the Southern Domain, I would like to request that all of you bear witness to this battle!" His words rang out like thunder, causing a great stir among the tens of thousands of Cultivators below.

"Furnace Lord... he's... actually a Furnace Lord from the East Pill Division!!"

"Fang Mu. I remember! A year ago there was a new Furnace Lord in the East Pill Division named Fang Mu!"

"He's Fang Mu! A Furnace Lord!"

The Cultivators were in an uproar as they looked at Meng Hao. Great waves of astonishment filled their hearts. The name of the Faceless Azure Hero already caused their hearts to shake, but what was even more shocking were the words 'Furnace Lord.'

The glittering eyes of all the Cultivators were now glued onto Meng Hao!

"No wonder he didn't kill any of the heroes that he challenged in battle!"

"Grandmaster Fang Mu was doing it all to gain enlightenment! He had to attack, but he's an alchemist, and didn't want to make enemies. Therefore, he restrained his killing intent. This is an alchemist of our Southern Domain! This is a true Chosen Cultivator of the Southern

Domain!!!”

Amidst the uproar, Black Lands Dao Child Luo Chong’s face suddenly changed. He stared blankly at Meng Hao, his mind reeling. Meng Hao’s identity was causing a huge commotion amongst the crowd, but it was completely rocking his mind and heart.

Next to him, Xu Fei was also panting and looking at Meng Hao with an expression of disbelief.

The three azure-masked Cultivators had grim expressions in their faces. Two of them, not the skinny one, were frowning.

Intense killing intent poured from Meng Hao’s eyes, and his gaze shifted to the skinny, azure-masked Cultivator. “My battle today is with this man. If anyone interferes, if any other Black Lands Cultivators participate, then I request all the Fellow Daoists from the Southern Domain to stop them!”

Wang Lihai’s eyes glittered, and he immediately said. “The Wang Clan of the Southern Domain will bear witness to this battle. If the Black Lands Cultivators interfere, then they will make an enemy of the entire Wang Clan!”

“The Solitary Sword Sect of the Southern Domain will bear witness to the battle. If a second Black Lands Cultivator makes a move, they will make an enemy of the Solitary Sword Sect.”

“The Golden Frost Sect of the Southern Domain will bear witness to the battle! If any Black Lands Cultivator dares to join the battle, the Golden Frost Sect will be forced to interfere!”

“The Blood Demon Sect of the Southern Domain will bear witness to the battle!”

“The Black Sieve Sect of the Southern Domain will bear witness to the battle!”

“The Song Clan of the Southern Domain will bear witness to the battle!”

“The....”

One after another, voices rang out, without stop. The tens of thousands

of Cultivators were no longer sitting cross-legged. They were all standing, glaring up angrily at the Black Lands Cultivators.

All the Clans. All the Sects. Their voices rang out, melding into a roar that shook heaven and earth. It was like an endless thunder.

The Cultivators here were all of the Foundation Establishment stage. However, they represented countless Sects and Clans of the Southern Domain. Clearly, they could influence the attitude of their Sects as a whole. Considering that they were all giving voice to the same opinion, the Black Lands Cultivators were now pushed into a very narrow corner.

One mistake could give rise to a great war between the Southern Domain and the Black Lands!

Luo Chong's face twisted, and his body trembled. Next to him, Xu Fei was panting. The other black-robed Cultivators from their group all looked very nervous, and were currently rotating their Cultivation bases.

The faces of the three azure-masked Cultivators immediately changed.

The skinny Cultivator had a grim expression underneath his mask. He stepped forward and said, "This is a personal matter between this kid of the junior generation and I, Yang. Outsiders need not interfere. It has nothing to do with the Black Lands. Fang Mu, you pup, it seems you're seeking to die. Very well, I shall help you!" His voice rang out, causing the surrounding Black Lands Cultivators to back up. In an instant, the only people floating in the air were him and Meng Hao.

This was to be their battleground!

"It seems you've put a lot of thought into how you want to die," said the azure-masked Cultivator coolly. "If I didn't help you, I would feel bad." Killing intent radiated out of his eyes. He lifted his hand, and suddenly a light yellow Qi appeared. This was none other than his Core Qi!

This Qi had ever-changing forms, and currently it transformed into the image of a sword.

Meng Hao watched on with concentration in his eyes. This was a crucial battle for him. His Cultivation base was constantly rotating, along with

that imperceptible Qi. It seemed to thirst for Meng Hao to make an attack, to grow stronger. When he did, it would transform into a charging force that would lead to a breakthrough in his Cultivation base!

Chapter 270: Battling Core Formation!

The azure-masked Cultivator, who was surnamed Yang, glanced coldly at Meng Hao. Meng Hao had left a deep impression on him; it was extremely shocking that not only was he not dead, he had actually made a breakthrough in his Cultivation base. It left the man with an uncomfortable sense of danger.

It was actually very humiliating. This was a late Foundation Establishment Cultivator, and yet he felt a sense of danger because of him. Beneath his mask, the man's face was grim. Almost the same instant that the words left his mouth, he began to move forward.

His foot descended, sending ripples out into the air. An indescribable roaring sound rose up which vibrated inside the hearts of the tens of thousands of Cultivators. Only the azure-masked Cultivator and Meng Hao were up in the air. The man's first step seemed to be reverberating around throughout the entire area, but in fact, was aimed directly at Meng Hao.

Meng Hao's face was the same as ever. The roaring inside him wasn't bothersome in the slightest. His eight Perfect Dao Pillars rotated with power of the Violet Qi from the East technique, causing Meng Hao's body to glow with a violet aura. It spread throughout him and out, causing his azure garment to suddenly appear violet-colored!

The air around him filled with a violet glow, causing him to appear anything but ordinary to the surrounding Cultivators!

"Violet Qi from the East! That's the Violet Fate Sect's Violet Qi from the East!"

"Furnace Lords from the East Pill Division can cultivate that! He really is Fang Mu!" Everyone was completely focused on what was happening. Before, there had been some who suspected Meng Hao wasn't who he said he was. However, the buzz of conversation washed away any such doubts. After seeing the violet glow, everyone was certain about his identity.

"I let you go last time, and now you're back looking to die!" The azure-

masked Cultivator gave a cold snort, then advanced further. His right hand suddenly lifted up, flashing an incantation and then pointing forward. It seemed like a very casual movement, but actually, this was not the first time the azure-masked Cultivator had faced off against Meng Hao. Their battle a year ago had left quite the impression on him. That, combined with the sense of danger he currently felt, made him feel very uneasy. Therefore, he attacked with full force.

Howling sounds like those of phoenixes filled the air. In the blink of an eye, ten massive dragons appeared in front of the azure-masked Cultivator, followed by ten illusory phoenixes. Their appearance caused everything to begin to shake. They carried a frigid iciness with them that seemed capable of freezing everything around them. The azure-masked Cultivator waved his finger, sending them racing toward Meng Hao.

Meng Hao took a deep breath. His Cultivation base roared into action; his Perfect Dao Pillars fully rotated emitting boundless power to fill his body. The violet glow around him grew thicker, and his eyes filled with the desire for battle.

This battle was of utmost importance to him!

This battle was the key to completing the great circle of Foundation Establishment!

This battle was the result of a year of waiting! He had been defeated a year ago, and now, he would turn the tables and... battle Core Formation!

Meng Hao's right hand shot up, and he quickly used his thumb to slice his four fingers. Blood flowed down as extended his hand forward.

One finger, two fingers... in the blink of an eye, five illusory fingers appeared. Meng Hao's vision turned the color of blood and a roaring filled the air as the five fingers formed together into the Blood Palm.

The massive, blood-colored palm emanated a reddish glow, along with a shocking killing aura. It was filled with the power of Meng Hao's eight Perfect Dao Pillars, as well as a violet aura, then shot forward with indescribable speed.

A roaring like that of thunder filled the sky. At the same time that the palm appeared, Meng Hao bit down on the tip of his tongue and spit out some blood. The blood drop shot out to merge into the Blood Palm.

“Blood Palm!” bellowed Meng Hao. His left hand lifted up and he quickly formed another massive Blood Palm, this one of a left hand. It also shot forward.

The power of the two Blood Palms, filled with blood from Meng Hao’s Cultivation base, began merging together. It was a shocking sight. It only took a moment for them to reach the ten phoenixes and ten dragons. They all slammed into each other.

A shockingly loud boom rattled out like thunder. The ten dragons and ten phoenixes howled. They were formed from the power of a Core Formation Cultivation base, and were virtually invincible. Meng Hao’s first Blood Palm immediately disintegrated.

As it did, the blood from Meng Hao’s Cultivation base burned away. The second Blood Palm roared in. There was a massive boom as six dragons and seven phoenixes were exterminated!

The remaining four dragons and three phoenixes screamed through the air toward Meng Hao, slamming into him, submerging him. However, the roaring sound soon dissipated, and the ripples in the air ceased. Everything became calm again, and Meng Hao emerged, the violet light emanating from his body rising up to the heavens.

A bit of blood seeped down the corner of his mouth. His eyes were violet-colored, as were all the veins in his body, and a powerful Qi emanated from him. All of this demonstrates that Meng Hao had just used his own power to stand up against the magical technique of a Core Formation Cultivator!

Violet Pupil Transformation flowed rapidly through Meng Hao’s body, healing his injuries. Meng Hao didn’t care about the injuries, of course. The desire for battle grew even stronger within his eyes as he stared at the azure-masked Cultivator.

Beneath the mask, the man’s face was extremely unsightly. He knew that

his opponent was not ordinary, and had experienced an increase in his Cultivation base. But how could he possibly have predicted that the increase would be so shocking?

This first exchange of blows between the two opponents caused the surrounding Southern Domain Cultivators to reel in shock. This included Wang Lihai, Han Shandao, and all the other Chosen.

“Foundation Establishment battling Core Formation!!”

“Fang Mu is in late Foundation Establishment, but his divine abilities and magical techniques are almost the same as a Core Formation expert with no Core Qi!! But... that azure-masked man from the Black Lands hasn’t utilized his Core Qi yet....” The buzz of conversation filled the air. Before, they had voiced their support for Meng Hao in the belief that he dared to battle Core Formation because he had some treasured item.

The shocking scene which had unfolded in front of them, however, had nothing to do with any treasured item, but rather, a magical technique!

This clearly showed that he was by no means weak. He had directly resisted a Core Formation Cultivator’s magical technique. Granted, his opponent hadn’t employed Core Qi, but even so, Meng Hao was clearly qualified to challenge Core Formation!

Meng Hao advanced, lifting his right hand. As he did, the violet light emanating from his body seemed to transform into liquid, which flowed toward his hand. There, it coalesced into something that looked like a blinding, violet sun.

His eyes glittered brightly as the power of his eight Perfect Dao Pillars catalyzed the Violet Qi from the East technique. As the Violet Pupil Transformation healed his body, Meng Hao used the power of Violet Qi from the East to unleash the most powerful magical technique he had learned.

“Violet Qi Guillotine!” 1

The Qi in Meng Hao’s hand transformed into a long, violet-colored blade. The curving blade expanded out, trailing wisps of violet smoke,

seeming to take all of Meng Hao's violet aura with it. Soon, it was dozens of meters long. Suddenly, it shot forward with indescribable speed toward the azure-masked Cultivator.

"What an insignificant skill," said the azure-masked Cultivator with a cold snort. "You overestimate yourself." To be pestered by a Foundation Establishment Cultivator, even one with clearly extraordinary abilities, was nothing more than a humiliation to this man. From the moment their battle had begun, he had felt shame.

He was filled with intense desire to kill Meng Hao. A virtually imperceptible light glittered in his eyes as his Core Qi suddenly appeared. The light yellow light roiled out, and within could be seen the indistinct shape of a sword. It emitted a fierce sword aura, along with an icy Qi.

Even as Meng Hao's Violet Qi Guillotine approached, the azure-masked Cultivator's Core Qi exploded out. The sword shot forward, transforming into a blinding beam of light.

It slammed into the Violet Qi Guillotine, and a booming roiled out. The strands of Violet Qi trembled, then collapsed into pieces. The blinding sword continued on, speeding directly toward Meng Hao's head.

Meng Hao's pupils constricted as a sudden sense of intense danger filled him. Even as the Core Qi sword destroyed the Violet Qi Guillotine and shot toward him, a greenish-blue shield appeared around him. This was none other than his protective jade pendant.

A boom filled the air as the azure-masked Cultivator's Core Qi sword collapsed into pieces. When that happened, the azure-masked Cultivator let out a grunt and slapped his bag of holding. Immediately, a black flying sword appeared in his hand. He tossed it up, fusing it with Core Qi. The process seemed to backfire somewhat, diminishing his Core Qi momentarily before it restored itself.

"In terms of stances, how could I possibly meet defeat a second time!" The man's eyes filled with ridicule as he waved his right hand. From the Core Qi above his head, the black sword shot out toward Meng Hao.

"Let's see how long your Nascent Soul Cultivation blood can resist for

this time!” The black sword emitted a piercing shriek as it approached Meng Hao.

Suddenly a massive boom filled the air, and Meng Hao was shoved backward. His expression never changed, though; in fact, his desire for battle grew even more intense. At the moment, Meng Hao could clearly sense the Qi inside of him that would help him break through in his Cultivation base. It was fairly bursting with activity, constantly rotating, faster and faster. He could sense the imminent appearance of his ninth Dao Pillar!

“Almost there, but not quite enough battle Qi!” His eyes shining brightly as he watched the flying sword slam into the shield, which then filled with cracks. As he retreated, he slapped his bag of holding to produce a large collection of bottles.

The azure-masked Cultivator’s eyes were grim as he sent another black flying sword slamming into Meng Hao’s greenish-blue shield. He wanted the shield broken as soon as possible, and to do so, had already wasted several of the specially crafted life swords.

“Once your Nascent Soul blood protection is gone, you’re dead,” he said coldly. “It will only take one slash of my Core Qi sword.” His voice was filled with intense killing intent.

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1. Meng Hao learned the Violet Qi Guillotine (along with another technique called Violet Pupil Transformation) in chapter 242.

Chapter 271: Soul Emergence Sword, Slay the Lone Star!

The boom which sounded out could be heard for fifty kilometers in every direction. The tens of thousands of Southern Domain Cultivators looked on in shock. Even the screen above the Dao Geyser flickered.

As the boom reverberated through the air, popping sounds could be heard as cracks filled the shield surrounding Meng Hao. Finally, it collapsed into countless pieces which then drifted away.

A bit of blood seeped out of the corner of the azure-masked Cultivator's mouth. In the process of destroying Meng Hao's Nascent Soul blood shield, he had lost six life swords. This had cost him his Core Qi; it would not be able to recover for the time it takes half an incense stick to burn.

However, the azure-masked Cultivator didn't care. From what he could tell, as long as this Fang Mu didn't have the protection of the Nascent Soul blood, then he could be killed with little difficulty.

His Core Qi would recover in the time it takes half an incense stick to burn. After all, it was produced as a product of his cultivation, and belonged solely to him. In his opinion, if this Fang Mu hadn't possessed the Nascent Soul blood the previous year, it would have been simple to capture him.

"Let's find out how long you can last against me without that blood!" laughed the azure-masked Cultivator. He slapped his bag of holding to produce what appeared to be a ball made of intertwined hair. He flung out it with his left hand.

"Distilled Fiends!" As the man's gruff voice rang out, the hair suddenly expanded into a massive black net, fifty meters wide. It emanated an intense killing aura that shot up into the sky; in the middle of the net could be seen multiple phantom souls. Their faces were filled with agony, and they emitted soundless wails.

A buzz of conversation immediately arose among the tens of thousands

of Southern Domain Cultivators. It seemed many of them recognized the treasured item which the azure-masked Cultivator had produced.

“Black Lands Distilled Fiends Net!! That’s one of the three great treasures of Black Lands Cultivators! Any Black Lands Cultivator can create it, but each one will be different, based on the personality of who created it. The power of each treasure will also be different.”

“It’s definitely a Black Lands Distilled Fiends Net, created from living souls. Living people are distilled down into souls, which are then sealed into hair and then weaved into a net. It’s a shocking, sordid treasure which is so sinister that it is impervious to all poisons under Heaven.”

“I can’t believe that Black Lands Cultivators really are all so cruel and merciless! That net must have over a thousand souls in it....”

Meng Hao’s eyes narrowed. The killing aura of this Distilled Fiends Net rose into the sky, and the silent screams of the souls filled the air. Looking at it, Meng Hao felt as if his own soul were about to be torn from his body.

“So,” he thought, “he’s using this treasure to counter my Dao of poison!” He lifted his right hand and waved it in front of him. The pill bottles in front of him flew out and then exploded in mid-air. Massive quantities of colorful mist poured out, filling the surroundings. Anyone who looked at it would be immediately shocked; it clearly contained multiple types of poisons.

As the mist roiled out, the Distilled Fiends Net flew through the air. As soon as the two ran into each other, hissing sounds emanated from the poison mist. In the blink of an eye, the souls within the Distilled Fiends Net began to consume the mist.

At the same time, the net began to spread out, surrounding Meng Hao.

The azure-masked Cultivator’s hands flashed with relentless incantation gestures, and he would occasionally gesture with a finger. The souls within the Distilled Fiends Net shrieked and consumed the poison mist. At the same time, the net drew closer to Meng Hao, threatening to envelop him completely.

The azure-masked Cultivator's eyes were cold. There were many magics that he could use, but he had opted for the Distilled Fiends Net. This was not only because he feared Meng Hao's poisons, but even more so because he wanted him to die screaming. The more miserable and shrill his cries, the more his own anger could be sated.

The mist was rapidly diminishing and the Distilled Fiends Net was shrinking. It was now less than fifty meters away from Meng Hao. Meng Hao's eyes flickered. He could sense the Cultivation base breakthrough Qi inside of him growing larger as he battled against Core Formation. It circulated rapidly, and seemed that at any moment, his ninth Dao Pillar would appear.

"Just a little bit more!" he thought, his eyes glittering coldly. He lifted his right hand to produce one of several poison pills that he had concocted after becoming a Furnace Lord in the East Pill Division....

Poison Flame Pill. Meng Hao crushed the pill between his fingers and then waved his hand. A green Flame Sea immediately roared up.

At the same time, he flung out his left hand, sending more pills soaring into the air. When they hit the green flames, they melted. In the blink of an eye, they transformed into a blue Water Screen. This was Sourceless Alchemy Water!

Water and flame cannot coexist. However, the Water Screen and the Flame Sea both seemed to be working in unison. They spread out with a roar, making a beeline for the Distilled Fiends Net.

"Sourceless Water sets spirits adrift!" Meng Hao's eyes glittered as the Sourceless Alchemy Water reached the Distilled Fiends Net. It gently passed through the net, covering the souls within. They seemed to stick to it as if it were glue, seemingly about to be pulled completely away from the net.

As the souls were torn away, the green Flame Sea landed, its heat radiating out in all directions.

All of this takes some time to say, but the azure-masked Cultivator

reacted in the blink of an eye. Eyes narrowing, he immediately made an incantation gesture with his right hand and then lifted his finger. At the same time as it descended, Meng Hao produced ten black medicinal pills from his bag of holding.

These medicinal pills emitted no medicinal aroma, and in fact emitted a shocking aura. The original pill had not been concocted by Meng Hao, but rather, won from Chen Jiaxi. Furthermore, they had not been concocted by a scarlet-robed alchemist of the World Pill Division, but rather a rank higher than that, a golden-robed alchemist who could concoct magic pills. The name of the pill was Magical Thunder Peal!

Chen Jiaxi had only possessed one, which had been gifted to him by his Master to study. After winning the pill, Meng Hao had realized how incredible it was and thus made a few copies.

His eyes shone with a cold light as he waved his arm, sending the Magic Thunder Peal pills flying out.

“Thunder, detonate!” he cried suddenly. As his voice echoed out, the ten Magic Thunder Peal pills suddenly exploded. A massive roar filled the air, which transformed into a shocking attack. The Distilled Fiends Net began to tremble, and the souls began to emit miserable shrieks.

Thunder magic can restrain all types of apparitions. Therefore, the Magic Thunder Peal pill was not very useful against Cultivators, but was incredibly powerful when used on souls.

“Fang Mu, how dare you!!!” The azure-masked Cultivator’s heart dripped; he had spent many years refining the Distilled Fiends Net. It was only one step away from turning from a net into a flag, whereupon it would be even more powerful. The net contained a thousand souls, and normally couldn’t be damaged by a Magic Thunder Peal. However... Meng Hao had led with a poison mist, then poison water, then poison flames, and finally the thunder magic. Because of all of these reasons, the souls in the Distilled Fiends Net were being destroyed.

The azure-masked Cultivator’s eyes were filled with veins of blood. A vicious aura blazed from his eyes. He lowered into a half horse stance,

then stretched his arms down. He lifted his head, and then stretched his arms out as if he were grasping something. Then he suddenly straightened up.

“Shade Horses, charge!”

Everything grew dark, and gasps could be heard from the tens of thousands of surrounding spectators. Suddenly, in front of the azure-masked Cultivator, nine black horses appeared. Strands of Death Qi emanated off of them.

The nine horses' flesh was decomposing. They were clad in armor, and emanated a damp coldness. They raised their heads to the sky and neighed as they charged toward Meng Hao.

There were only nine horses, but as they charged, it seemed more like an army of ten thousand horses. In fact, it seemed that riding atop the Shade Horses were intangible spectres. A cold wind screamed out, blasting across Meng Hao.

His eyes flickered. Even as the Distilled Fiends Net dissipated around him, he squinted his eyes. He was filled with a sense of imminent danger, but at the same time, he could also sense the Qi strand within him becoming even more active. It rotated furiously, and he sensed that soon he would be able to achieve a breakthrough in his Cultivation base.

From what he could tell, he was only half a step away from the breakthrough!

He knew that the only way to take that half step was... to fight!!

Without hesitation, he advanced forward. As the nine Shade Horses approached, he lifted his hands, five fingers splayed, and struck forward. Coldness radiated out of his eyes.

“Eighth Demon Sealing Hex!” Meng Hao could suddenly see ghost images springing up everywhere. Everything was overlapping, as if the entire world were filled with duplicates of itself. The ghost images folded in toward the approaching Shade Horses, pushing down onto them.

The Shade Horses suddenly stopped moving and began to tremble.

Previously, their eyes had been red and blank, but now they filled with fear. They trembled so hard that it seemed they might disintegrate at any moment.

The sight of it struck fear into the heart of the azure-masked Cultivator.

“Damned Foundation Establishment pup. It’s time to end this fight!” The azure-masked Cultivator’s mind filled with fury. No matter how he attacked, he couldn’t kill his opponent. The battle was being witnessed by the tens of thousands of Cultivators, making the whole thing incredibly embarrassing. His killing intent grew more intense, and he suddenly raised his right hand and pushed down onto his forehead. His eyes began to glow with a crimson light.

“Core Soul Emergence Slaying!” he said suddenly. The indistinct image of an Orange Core began to coalesce out of the top of his head.

“Soul Emergence Sword, Slay the Lone Star!” The azure-masked Cultivator’s body trembled, and he closed his eyes. The instant he did, a fissure appeared on the Orange Core, from which emerged a golden glow. It coalesced into a flying dagger which shot toward Meng Hao.

Atop the dagger was the faint image of a soul, which had the appearance of none other than the azure-faced Cultivator.

This sword disdained all defenses. It looked down on all magical techniques. Its power came from shocking killing intent. Once it emerged, it demanded a slaying!

Chapter 272: Massive Cultivation Base Breakthrough!

This sword could rock Heaven and Earth!

This sword shook the tens of thousands of Cultivators!

This sword embodied the fury of the azure-masked Cultivator. His desire to kill Meng Hao could grow no higher!

A sense of danger had existed in Meng Hao's heart since the beginning of the battle. However, the moment it had appeared, the Qi strand inside of him had begun to grow rapidly. Soon he would be able to experience a Cultivation base breakthrough.

Currently, Meng Hao had a very strong feeling that if he could stand up to this attack... then he would be able to have that breakthrough. The ancient battle Qi would give rise to his ninth Perfect Dao Pillar; he would be the first Cultivator in ages to be of the great circle of Perfect Foundation Establishment!

Determination filled Meng Hao's eyes. The Soul Sword approached, splitting the air as it raced toward him. Meng Hao suddenly stretched out both of his arms. His eyes were crimson as he called:

"Five Clones of Blood! Come!" Five blood-colored figures suddenly appeared around him. These were none other than the five Blood Clones Meng Hao had created.

The instant they appeared, ghost images sprung up around them as they transformed into their clone essence: the meat jelly skin!

They transformed at almost the same instant as the azure-masked Cultivator's Soul Sword arrived, filled with killing intent. Instead of slamming into Meng Hao's forehead, it hit the meat jelly skin!

A massive explosion filled the air. The five pieces of meat jelly skin were sent flying back, undamaged, but unable to control the force of the impact. They slammed into Meng Hao, causing him to spin backward like a kite

with its string cut, blood spraying from his mouth.

The Soul Sword whistled through the air, looking a bit dimmer than before. Obviously the obstruction of the meat jelly skin had shaken it; however, it was nothing more than a pause before it once again shot toward Meng Hao.

Although Meng Hao coughed up some more blood, everything was actually happening just as he had predicted. He retreated backward and, having no time to wipe the blood from his mouth, drew out the Wooden Time Sword.

A ferocious look covered his face, and intense killing intent radiated out. On the surface, it seemed that this battle with Core Formation was an even match; only he knew that the slightest mistake on his part would result in instant death.

It was astounding that he had been able to last as long as he had. The most critical aspect of the fight had of course been when he used the jade pendant to nullify his opponent's powerful Core Qi!

The resulting temporary weakness in his opponent was what had allowed Meng Hao to hold on to this point.

The resulting life-or-death battle was causing the Cultivation base breaking Qi inside him to grow. Every attack he had made caused the Qi strand to grow many times faster than it had in his previous fights with Foundation Establishment.

Therefore, he would not flinch from this battle.

The Time Sword had arrived in the Southern Domain; exactly how powerful it was, Meng Hao wasn't sure. It had whittled away some of Luo Chong's longevity, but he was merely a Foundation Establishment Cultivator, and Meng Hao had expended almost no effort in the attack. He had not even attempted to draw more power out of the sword. But now, he was up against Core Formation.... Meng Hao's eyes filled with decisiveness; the entire battle now rested upon this treasure!

As he lifted up the Wooden Time Sword, he zoned out everything around

him. All of his concentration was focused upon the sword. It was as if he were the sword, and the sword were him!

It was hard to tell whether his body followed the movements of the sword, or if the sword followed the indications of his will. Right now, Meng Hao had complete and utter faith in the sword. He had faith that the sword could turn the tide of death!

This faith seems fantastic, but actually, after his mind entered the sword, he underwent a type of spontaneous enlightenment. It was like he was practicing cultivation... that resulted in faith!

The wooden sword did not emit any kind of brilliant light, nor did it send out shocking ripples. It merely rose up and then slashed toward the incoming Soul Sword.

The azure-masked Cultivator's Soul Sword shook.

For the first time in the battle, the azure-masked Cultivator sensed a profound feeling of danger. As he floated there within the soul, he suddenly thought about what had happened to Dao Child Luo Chong.

And yet, he didn't retreat. He was unwilling to retreat, because if he didn't slay Fang Mu, then it would be hard to recall the soul. So he pushed forward at top speed, slamming into the descending Wooden Time Sword.

There was no roaring sound. No boom. Instead, a shocking wind of Time rose up, filling the entire area. It was a song of ages, a glow of life that seemed like some kind of illusion.

An archaic Qi filled the air and then melded with the surroundings. When the Soul Sword and the Wooden Time Sword collided, the azure-masked Cultivator's soul emitted a blood-curdling shriek that no one but he could hear. He had suffered no wound, but instead, was filled with indescribable pain. It was as if... his life force had been injured, as if life itself had been sucked away. Suddenly, he was incomparably weak.

The feeling of weakness filled him with unprecedented fear. It only took an instant for him to realize that the Wooden Time Sword had caused him to lose a full sixty-year cycle of longevity!!

This was the result of only one blow of the sword. Before a second blow could land, the azure-masked Cultivator's soul let out a fierce shout. The Soul Sword shot forward, stabbing completely through Meng Hao's chest and then disappearing in the resulting shower of blood.

Blood sprayed from Meng Hao's mouth, and his face went pale white. His body turned into a beam of colourful light as he fell down toward the Dao Geyser, and the glowing screen.

When the Soul Sword disappeared, the azure-masked Cultivator's body shook. Blood sprayed from his mouth as his eyes opened. As he staggered backward, his body aged. He coughed up more blood. His mask suddenly fell off, revealing the pallid face of an old man, completely devoid of blood.

After entering the Core Formation stage, this man had never met someone as difficult to slay as Meng Hao. He panted, his face pale. He didn't let his guard down at all, though, and was just about to charge again. This was because he knew... the sword had not pierced through Meng Hao's heart. At the last minute, Meng Hao had moved to the side, causing the sword to miss the vital spot.

Suddenly, shock covered his face as he looked toward Meng Hao.

Below, the tens of thousands of Cultivators also looked shocked. They saw everything that had happened, including the sword piercing Meng Hao through the chest. Now, though, their eyes went wide with disbelief.

All eyes were fixed on Meng Hao!

He had been falling, but then he stopped in mid-air. He floated there, and when his eyes opened, they radiated an icy glow. His wound was serious, and even the restorative power of the Violet Pupil Transformation wouldn't enable him to recover in a short period of time.

What was so shocking to the unmasked Cultivator and the other tens of thousands of Cultivators, had nothing to do with that. What shocked them to core was that Meng Hao was currently floating... in the exact same position as the figure on the glowing screen! Their bodies were superimposed.

A powerful feeling suddenly surged through Meng Hao. He could clearly sense the Qi strand exploding out with the power to cause Cultivation base breakthrough.

This explosive Qi caused incredible shock to fill all hearts: that of the unmasked Cultivator, Wang Lihai, the Black Lands Dao Children, and everyone else!

A Cultivation base breakthrough in the midst of battle!

Even as everyone felt shock running through them, Meng Hao took a deep breath. He had been waiting for this moment for a long time. In order to achieve this breakthrough, he had even been willing to battle against the Core Formation stage. Finally, the ancient battle Qi erupted within him. Finally, Meng Hao could sense the indescribable speed with which his ninth Dao Pillar was forming.

Ten percent, twenty percent, thirty percent....

He didn't need the approval of Heaven and Earth to form his ninth Dao Pillar. However, he needed Spiritual Energy. At the moment, the eight Dao Pillars within his body were emitting shocking amounts of spiritual power, all pouring into the ninth Dao Pillar.

Forty percent, fifty percent, sixty percent....

Meng Hao's Qi grew more and more powerful. As it did, his body emitted a blinding violet light that shot up into the sky and filled the surroundings. A mighty pressure emerged from him, pressing down onto the tens of thousands of Foundation Establishment Cultivators, shaking their minds and spirits. Their Cultivation bases became unstable, and their Dao Pillars trembled. It was beyond their control! It was as if Meng Hao's presence was causing all of the other Dao Pillars to bend in worship of him.

It seemed as if Meng Hao were the sovereign of the Foundation Establishment stage. The massive pressure he exuded seemed capable of causing the rest of Foundation Establishment to be nothing more than mortals.

The Qi grew more and more intense, causing everyone's minds to reel. The heart of the now unmasked Cultivator filled with an intense feeling of danger.

"I can't let him get any stronger," he thought, his face twisting. "Dammit, he's in the midst of the Dao Geyser enlightenment!" Without hesitation, he began to fly toward Meng Hao at top speed.

However, as he neared, a roaring sound suddenly rose up from the Dao Geyser. In front of the shocked tens of thousands of Cultivators, it erupted with boundless spiritual energy!

Massive amounts of it shot up, and the nexus of the eruption was none other than Meng Hao himself. Immediately, the unmasked Cultivator was forced to stop. He didn't dare to approach, and could only watch as Meng Hao was enveloped by the spiritual energy, and then disappeared.

"Fang Mu gained enlightenment! The Dao Geyser only erupts with spiritual energy when someone gains enlightenment!!"

"But... it's erupting with so much spiritual energy...."

"When Li Shiqi advanced to the Core Formation stage, there was only about thirty percent as much spiritual energy as this. It was the same with Li Daoyi. Fang Mu... just what stage is he breaking through to? There's so much spiritual energy!!"

The tens of thousands of Cultivators were in an uproar as they watched the spiritual energy exploding out and then pouring into Meng Hao's forming Dao Pillar.

It seemed as if this spiritual energy no longer belonged to Heaven and Earth, but to Meng Hao himself!

Seventy percent, eighty percent, ninety percent....

Finally... one hundred percent!

However, just as the ninth Dao Pillar was complete, a tremor of shock ran through Meng Hao. He had assumed everything was over. He felt an unprecedented amount of power inside of him. However....

A look of shock and disbelief filled his face as he noticed that the spiritual energy coursing through his body was actually forming...

A tenth Dao Pillar!

Chapter 273: Tenth Dao Pillar, Form!

Nine was the ultimate number in Heaven and Earth. But ten was perfect!

Meng Hao's mind and spirit trembled. In all the ancient records he had researched, he had never read anything that mentioned a tenth Dao Pillar in Foundation Establishment. Even in ancient times, Cultivators never had more than nine.

Because of the change in the Heavens, the path of the Qi Condensation stage had been broken, making the tenth level of Qi Condensation disappear. That information was recorded in the ancient records. However... there was no such information about a tenth Dao Pillar!

As a Furnace Lord of the East Pill Division, he was required to have a deep understanding of history. As such, it was very beneficial to comb through the ancient records looking for clues about the ancient Dao of alchemy. After becoming a Furnace Lord, he had browsed through a vast amount of the Violet Fate Sect's ancient records.

Despite all of that, he had never encountered any information regarding a Cultivator with a tenth Dao Pillar during Foundation Establishment.

And yet, Meng Hao could clearly sense... a tenth Dao Pillar was now forming!

Only Meng Hao was able to sense this tenth Dao Pillar, anyone else would be unable to. In much the same way that no one could sense which Cultivator the Nascent Soul blood he possessed came from, Meng Hao made sure that no one could pick up any clues about his Dao Pillars.

The only thing people could see was the increasing amount of spiritual energy erupting from the Dao Geyser. It showed no sign of lessening; it continued to envelop Meng Hao and he continued to absorb it.

As he absorbed the spiritual energy, the outline of the tenth Dao Pillar grew clearer.

Ten percent, twenty percent, thirty percent...

Dao pillar energy roared within Meng Hao, filling him with a power he

had never experienced before. A shocking feeling filled him, as if he were soaring to the highest heavens.

Power! Unprecedented power!

His Spiritual Sense continued to increase exponentially. Before, it could spread out over roughly two hundred fifty meters; now, five hundred, one thousand....

His mind was filled with clarity, and as the spiritual energy poured in, he could sense everything around him. His perception of everything was different than it had been before, clearer, as if everything was in more detail. This clarity was even deeper than what he had experienced in the moment when he acquired the Perfect Foundation.

“This... is this the true Perfect Foundation?” he murmured to himself. The world outside of the spiritual energy vortex was not visible, but with his Spiritual Sense, he could see it clearly.

His heart began to race. A feeling of resolve and excitement welled up within him. He took a deep breath, intense anticipation and steadfastness filling his eyes as the spiritual energy surged into him.

He slowly lifted his hand up, then looked down at it, closing it into a fist. As the fist tightened, he felt strength.

Unprecedented strength!

It felt as if his blood and flesh were reforming, filling with a power that shook his mind.

The shocking level of this power was such that Meng Hao felt as if he could tear magical treasures to pieces with his bare hands. This was a similar transformation as that which had occurred when he entered the tenth level of Qi Condensation. It felt like a baptism of sorts; the power of the tenth Dao Pillar was completely transforming him, making his body more suitable for cultivation, turning his body itself into a treasure! ¹

Meng Hao had the strong feeling that at the moment, he could crush all Foundation Establishment Cultivators without the aid of any magical techniques. Even Dao Children and Cultivators of the great circle of

Foundation Establishment could be destroyed bare handed.

Meng Hao began to pant. From the moment he had entered the Cultivation world, he had thirsted for power, had dreamed to stand at the pinnacle. One thing after another had happened to cause him to grow stronger, all the way to this day. Meng Hao clenched his fists. He knew... that he was striding the path he had dreamed of!

Only the strong could tread this path, and now, there was no turning back. He could only stubbornly continue!

More spiritual energy erupted from the Dao Geyser, inundating Meng Hao, growing his Spiritual Sense, feeding his body, growing his Cultivation base.

The range of his Spiritual Sense increased, his body grew stronger, and his Cultivation base shot upward. His tenth Dao Pillar was rapidly solidifying!

Forty percent, fifty percent, sixty percent....

The surrounding Southern Domain Cultivators watched on dumbstruck and panting. The indescribable spiritual energy erupting out of the Dao Geyser left them in a daze. The sheer amount of spiritual energy dwarfed that seen during the enlightenment experienced by anyone in the past.

This was especially true of the following ten or so breaths. The spiritual energy was not subsiding, but growing even more abundant, as if all of the power of the Dao Geyser were exploding out.

Black Lands Dao Children Luo Chong and Xu Fei panted in shock. Wang Lihai and the other Southern Domain Dao Children also watched on in disbelief.

“Is he... is he going to reach Core Formation?”

“It doesn’t look like Core Formation, but... the spiritual energy seems without end! It seems like an ordinary Core Formation Cultivator couldn’t even match up!”

Conversations buzzed endlessly among the surrounding Cultivators. The

person with the most unsightly face of all was none other than the unmasked azure-masked Cultivator. His aged face was now filled with shock. He could only stare fixedly at the shadow of Meng Hao within the dense spiritual energy.

The sense of impending crisis within him grew even more intense. The shadowy figure within the spiritual energy seemed to be transforming into something from his nightmares.

“I can’t let him continue!” the man said, gritting his teeth. His eyes filled with ferocity and determination. He lifted his hand to push against his forehead. A booming sound rolled out as the Core Qi, which had previously dissipated, once again seemed to ignite into being. The image of a sword once again appeared within the Core Qi. At the same time, the unmasked Cultivator flashed incantation gestures with both hands. The Core Qi sword screamed forth, heading directly toward Meng Hao, who was still enveloped with spiritual energy.

The sword moved with incredible speed, almost immediately reaching the spiritual energy vortex. A massive boom sounded out, but the sword was incapable of penetrating more than a teeny bit into the spiritual energy!!

The unmasked Cultivator was of the Core Formation stage, but the density of the spiritual energy erupting from the Dao Geyser was such that even his Core Qi sword couldn’t pierce through it.

The sword was stuck part way into the spiritual energy vortex. It began to tremble, as if it might be swept away at any moment.

It was at this moment that Meng Hao’s tenth Dao Pillar reached seventy percent completion!

His face unsightly, the unmasked Cultivator flashed an incantation sign with his right hand and then pressed down on his forehead. He then opened his mouth and spat out a mouthful of blood. The blood rapidly began to coalesce into the shape of another sword.

“Core Soul Emergence Slaying!” roared the unmasked Cultivator, his eyes glowing brightly. His right hand formed an incantation gesture and

then waved forward. Immediately, his eyes bulged and a tremor ran through his body. Ghost images of his own face suddenly flickered into existence. This was none other than his soul.

The soul flew out of his body, merging into the blood, solidifying into the form of a blood sword.

The sword buzzed, emitting a power seemingly capable of destroying anything. The blood sword shot out to merge with the Core Qi to form... a real sword!

The blood was an embryo, the soul was the sword spirit, and the Core Qi formed the blade. This was... the Cultivator's Consummate Life Force Sword! It emitted a shocking scream as it pierced into the spiritual energy vortex and headed directly toward Meng Hao.

It slowly approached him. Its speed was not great, but it showed no signs of stopping. It seemed it wouldn't stop moving until Meng Hao was dead. It approached at a crawl: one hundred meters, fifty meters, twenty five meters, fifteen meters....

Meng Hao closed his eyes. He floated in the midst of the vortex of spiritual energy, his tenth Dao Pillar now eighty percent complete!

The unmasked Cultivator's body trembled and his face was pale. It seemed as if his life force was being suppressed; Death Qi appeared. Despite this, he continued to exert maximum power, using his soul to power the Consummate Life Force Sword closer to Meng Hao.

The soul within the sword let out a deep howling noise. In the blink of an eye, the sword was now only ten meters from Meng Hao. The unmasked Cultivator could now clearly see Meng Hao floating there, eyes closed. He could also sense something awakening within Meng Hao, something that seemed like an ancient wild beast.

No one would interfere in this magical battle. It didn't matter that Meng Hao was at a critical juncture of a Cultivation base breakthrough. It didn't matter that the unmasked Cultivator's actions were virtually a sneak attack. This battle was between the two of them, and the two of them alone.

The other azure-masked Black Lands Cultivators did nothing to assist their compatriot. Nor did the Southern Domain Cultivators do anything to block him.

Within the space of a moment, the sword was three meters away from Meng Hao. It glittered coldly, heading directly toward his forehead....

Meng Hao's tenth Dao Pillar was rapidly congealing. It was now ninety percent complete!

"DIE!!" screamed the unmasked Cultivator's soul shrilly. The Consummate Life Force Sword emitted a roaring sound as it approached Meng Hao. Three meters. One meter. Half a meter....

Soon, it was only a few centimeters from Meng Hao's forehead!!

It was at this moment that an incredible, heaven-shaking roar filled Meng Hao's body. His tenth Dao Pillar was now one hundred percent complete!

Meng Hao slowly lifted his right hand, clasping two fingers down onto the tip of the Consummate Life Force Sword, which was only half a centimeter from his forehead.

"This is the true Perfect Foundation!" Meng Hao murmured to himself. His eyes suddenly snapped open, revealing frigid iciness and shocking killing intent.

This gaze contained a cold, callous aura.

This gaze was filled with a shocking, threatening glow.

This gaze erupted with an unbelievable domineering aura.

At the exact same time, Meng Hao could sense something within his bag of holding. Something inside was suddenly calling out with an incredible thirst.

This call came from within the blood-colored mask. It was coming from that which Meng Hao previously had been unable to even touch... the flag of three streamers! ²

1. Meng Hao reached the tenth level of Qi Condensation in chapter 75.
2. The flag of three streamers has been mentioned a few times, including chapter 130, chapter 137, chapter 177.

Chapter 274: The Flag Flies; Destroy the Three Incarnations!

During this explosive moment, all of the spiritual energy in the area poured into Meng Hao. It only took a few moments for it to disappear, having been completely absorbed by Meng Hao. Not a scrap remained.

The Dao Geyser had ceased its eruption and, in fact, seemed to be drying up. The screen projection in mid-air flickered, then completely disappeared. The Dao Geyser was indeed... thoroughly exhausted.

The tens of thousands of surrounding Cultivators watched on in silence. The Dao Geyser, which had been the focal point of such shocking events for the past year in the Southern Domain, dried up and turned into ash, which then disappeared into the air. Nothing remained.

Meng Hao had apparently exhausted all of the spiritual energy it contained. There was no more enlightenment to be gained, so it disappeared.

A deathly silence filled the air. The tens of thousands of Cultivators looked on with blank expressions... however, it didn't take long before they were thrown into an uproar.

"The Dao Geyser... is gone?"

"It should have lasted for a few more days, but... it's been completely dried up!"

"Just what sort of breakthrough did Fang Mu have? He obviously hasn't reached Core Formation. But he's... he's clearly... caused the Dao Geyser to dry up early!!"

Black Lands Dao Children Luo Chong and Xu Fei were panting. To them, this visit to the western region of the Southern Domain had been shocking to the extreme. The cause of this shock was none other than a single Cultivator.

This Cultivator was... a Furnace Lord from the East Pill Division of the

Violet Fate Sect!

The two other azure-masked Cultivators from the Black Lands watched on, seemingly unaffected. However, great waves of shock surged through their hearts, not because of the drying up of the Dao Geyser, but because of Meng Hao's attacks earlier.

This was the first time they had ever witnessed Foundation Establishment battling Core Formation. Furthermore... while Meng Hao was clearly at a disadvantage, he had not suffered defeat. Even more astonishing, Meng Hao had experienced a Cultivation breakthrough in the midst of battle. That was something rarely seen. Something even more rarely seen, was how Meng Hao was currently clasping a Life Force Sword between his fingers!

"A Foundation Establishment Cultivator shouldn't even be able to touch a sword like that.... Is he... is he really an alchemist?" This was the shocking question which floated in the minds of both of the azure-masked experts.

As the conversations buzzed out, the tens of thousands of Southern Domain Cultivators stared up at Meng Hao, their eyes filled with a variety of complicated expressions.

Meng Hao's expression was the same as ever. Despite being the focus of tens of thousands gazes, not an ounce of change touched his face.

He wasn't sure how powerful his ten Dao Pillars were, but deep in his heart he knew that... before, despite his caution, he really was no match at all for even the early Core Formation stage. Now, however... things were different.

He now faced a Core Formation Cultivator whose longevity had been damaged and whose soul had been injured. He wasn't completely sure he could come out victorious, but this Cultivator had sustained severe internal injuries... killing him shouldn't be too difficult!

A cold glow filled his eyes. He pinched down on the sword which he held between his two fingers. Power rose up within him, and his ten Dao Pillars rotated. Unprecedented power flowed through his arms and into his

fingers!

Popping sounds rang out from the sword, and suddenly, cracks covered its surface. Within the space of a few breaths, it completely collapsed into dust.

The soul within it emitted a blood-curdling shriek and then vanished.

As the soul vanished and the sword disintegrated, tears of blood ran down the face of the unmasked Cultivator. Blood also poured out of his nose and ears as he staggered backward, coughing up a mass of blood. He lifted his pale face, and it was filled with ferocity, appearing to the onlookers to be even demented with insanity.

He lifted his right hand to slap his bag of holding. A black statuette appeared; it appeared to be a dragon, and yet not a dragon, like a python and yet not a python. This was none other than a Flood Dragon!

It had a single horn jutting out of its head, and two clawed arms on its abdomen. Its body was bluish black. The instant it appeared, a fiendish aura filled the area, causing the previously sunny sky to fill with dark clouds.

A faint cry rose up that seemed to come from ancient times, echoing out to shake the minds of the tens of thousands of Cultivators.

As the cry echoed out, the ancient Flying Rain-Dragon Core within Meng Hao's first Dao Pillar suddenly seemed to wake from slumber. It began to tremble.

A moment later, the air behind Meng Hao began to ripple, and an enormous, illusory ancient Flying Rain-Dragon appeared. It glared down at the statue of the Flood Dragon as if it were looking at... food!

In ancient times, Flood Dragons were nothing more than food for Flying Rain-Dragons!

The phantom image of the Flying Rain-Dragon was invisible to the onlookers. Suddenly, the roar of the Flood Dragon statue seemed to cease.

The unmasked Cultivator glared at Meng Hao. One word at a time, he

said, "Transform Core Qi into a Flood Dragon Ancestor! Open a Great Dao with Cultivation base blood. Feed this dragon spawn with the body. Use the soul to give birth to slaughter!" The man bit down on the tip of his tongue and spit out a glob of blood onto the statuette.

"I draw on my power to call upon the Flood Dragon Ancestor!" His body trembled as he raised his head to the sky and howled. In an instant, cracks covered the Flood Dragon statue. Popping sounds filled the air, and the surrounding tens of thousands of Cultivators watched as the statuette crumbled to pieces.

It disintegrated, and before the countless bluish black fragments could scatter, a wind sprang up, gathering them together, distorting them, transforming them into the image of a Flood Dragon.

The image was extremely lifelike, and when it appeared, a vast coldness sprang up to spread out. The unmasked Cultivator's expression was vicious as he glared at Meng Hao.

"Flood Dragon Ancestor, I request that you slay this man!"

As soon as the words were out of his mouth, the phantom Flood Dragon turned. Two cold dots that resembled eyes appeared on its head. It stared at Meng Hao for a moment, seemingly itching to attack. Suddenly, it sprang into action, shooting directly toward Meng Hao.

As it approached, the frigid Qi soared to the heavens; it seemed as if everything around it would be frozen in an instant.

In the blink of an eye, it was three hundred meters from Meng Hao!

Meng Hao's eyes shone brightly. He didn't retreat or evade; instead, he took a deep breath, lifted his hand and began to slice his fingers. Five fingers were soon covered with blood. He closed his eyes, bent down, and stretched his hand out.

"Blood Death World!" he cried, his voice filled with an aura of blood and gore. The instant the words rang out, his vision turned the color of blood.

At the same time, a bloody aura emanated from his right hand, enveloping the surroundings, causing everything within three thousand

meters to turn the color of blood!

The Flood Dragon, too, was enveloped within this world of blood.

This unique world was... the third magical art from the Blood Immortal Legacy, the one he had previously been incapable of unleashing... the Blood Death World!

As soon as the Blood Death World appeared, five blood phantoms appeared around Meng Hao. These were none other than... his five indestructible Blood Clones!

A boom filled the air, filling the hearts of the tens of thousands of Cultivators with shock. The unmasked Cultivator's face was pale white; it goes without saying that the appearance of the Blood Death World filled his heart with astonishment.

This was especially true because the Flood Dragon, which he previously thought to be incredibly astonishing, was now emitting a miserable shriek as it struggled within the Blood Death World. It seemed to be fighting against some invisible power that it just couldn't shake off.

As its shrieks rang out, Meng Hao slowly straightened up. He began to clench the fist of his right hand.

As his fist slowly closed, the Blood Death World suddenly shrank, seemingly following the movement of his hand.

As its borders shrank, they slammed into the shrieking Flood Dragon, carrying it with them. In the blink of an eye, the Blood Death World had disappeared, completely shrinking into Meng Hao's fist. A faint aura of blood seeped up from between his fingers.

Meng Hao's expression was the same as ever. He slowly loosened his fingers, and as he did, chunky bits of bluish-black dust floated off his palm to dissipate in the wind.

Gasps could be heard as people recognized the powder as... the remnants of the Flood Dragon statuette!

The unmasked Cultivator stared at Meng Hao, his eyes filled with fury.

“Today’s battle will end only in your death. The Foundation Establishment stage... is simply incapable of challenging the Core Formation stage.” He lifted his left hand and used his fingernail to scratch three bloody streaks onto his face, forming a triangle.

Bone was visible beneath the cuts, which oozed blood. The sight was shocking, but the unmasked Cultivator showed no signs that it hurt even the slightest bit. He glared at Meng Hao with even more ferocity than before.

Hoarse-voiced conversations immediately sprang up among the Cultivators below.

“That’s....”

“That’s a forbidden technique of the Black Lands, the Yellow Springs Three Incarnations Seal!”

As the word spread among the Cultivators, the unmasked Cultivator’s sinister voice filled the air: “Three incarnations are carved out within the yellow springs, three incarnations that can destroy all incarnations! Yellow Springs... Three Incarnations Seal!” A bizarre aura filled the eyes of the unmasked Cultivator. This was his most powerful magical technique. Utilizing this technique would come at no small cost to him, but at the moment, he didn’t care. The three bloody lacerations on his face began to burn, branding deeply into his face. They began to turn into scar tissue, filling his eyes with even more demented ferocity.

As the words left his mouth, he raised his right hand toward Meng Hao, then chopped it down into the air. At first, it seemed as if nothing had happened. However, Meng Hao’s heart trembled.

Meng Hao’s gaze was like lightning as he gazed at the unmasked Cultivator. His brow was furrowed. He had been able to exterminate the Flood Dragon because of the might exerted upon it by the Flying Rain-Dragon within the Blood Death World. As such, it had been dispersed when the Blood Death World dissipated.

“Time to end things,” he said softly, his brow relaxing. He raised his right hand to smack his bag of holding. Instead of retrieving an object, however,

he sent his Spiritual Sense into the blood-colored mask. It circled around the flag of three streamers, which he previously had never been able to use.

This was a precious treasure from the Blood Immortal Legacy.

As his Spiritual Sense hovered over the flag of three streamers, it began to sway, then suddenly unfurled. It entered his body, filling him with enlightenment. He raised his right hand and then waved it.

Behind him, surrounding him, in all directions...

Filling the sky, covering the land, appearing tattered and yet still emitting a power of Heavenly might... was one streamer from the flag of three streamers!!

It appeared dilapidated, and was gray, but stretched out seemingly without end.

As it stretched out... the yellow springs seemed to dry up, the three incarnations were exterminated, everything sank halfway to hell!!!

Chapter 275: The Difference Between Meng Hao and Fang Mu!

Meng Hao hovered in mid-air, his eyes closed, concealing the veins of blood which filled his eyes. His mind was reeling; he'd never imagined that taking out the flag of three streamers would unleash such heaven-shaking power.

Furthermore... this was only one streamer. In addition, the full flag of three streamers hadn't truly been unfurled; this was only a shadow of the treasure, projected by means of Meng Hao's Spiritual Sense.

However, even this projected power of the dilapidated flag was able to blot out the sky and cover the entire land. It completely filled the vision of the tens of thousands of Cultivators. Heaven and Earth were filled with darkness.

At this moment, Heaven and Earth seemed to be split in two. Heaven was Heaven, Earth was Earth. The flag existed beneath the Heavens, an Earth of its own, and above the Earth, a Heavenly Flag!

The world was covered with darkness; spirits faded, the Cosmos itself was pitch black.

An indescribable pressure roiled out, and an unprecedented sense of calamity filled the hearts of all the Cultivators. It was impossible to dispel, as if an enormous boulder was crushing down onto their bodies.

The entire world was suddenly plunged into deathly silence.

A gray Qi began to emanate from the bodies of everyone present. It curled up into the air, forming a mist, outside of which only the fluttering, dilapidated flag was visible. It twisted beneath the Heavens and the Earth, stretching out seemingly for hundreds of kilometers in all directions. It seemed as if it had replaced the Heavens, changed its will....

This dilapidated flag used one side to change the Heavens, and the other side to change the Earth.

A long time passed, or perhaps it was only a moment; the sky's normal color returned, and that which covered the earth disappeared. The gray mist dissipated, and the shocking flag that had appeared in the sky... disappeared without a trace.

Only Meng Hao remained floating in mid-air. No living thing existed alongside him. The Black Lands Cultivators remained, as did those from the Southern Domain. However, the appearance of the undulating flag up in the sky had caused their bodies to tremble and begin to sink down into the ground.

In addition to Meng Hao, the only thing left in the sky was a headless corpse which was slowly beginning to fall down to the ground. This corpse was none other than the unmasked Cultivator!

As of this moment, everything was over.

In the space of a breath, all eyes came to rest on Meng Hao. And then, the astonishment in everyone's hearts exploded out.

"The azure-masked Black Lands Cultivator... is dead...."

"A Foundation Establishment Cultivator just exterminated a Core Formation Cultivator. This is... this is...."

"How can Fang Mu possess such battle power? He dried up the Dao Geyser! Just what kind of luck was he able to seize?!?!"

"He's an alchemist, a Furnace Lord of the East Pill Division. But he was able to challenge Dao Children. In the future, he'll... he'll definitely be the number one figure of his generation in the Southern Domain!"

"More importantly, just what magical technique did Fang Mu just use? It's a technique that can slay Core Formation!"

Conversations buzzed. The Black Lands Cultivators, Luo Chong and Xu Fei, were pale-faced beneath their masks. They stared blankly at Meng Hao. Before this battle, they had believed themselves to be Chosen of Heaven; they truly thought that few people within the Foundation Establishment stage in the Southern Domain could possibly exceed them. At the most, perhaps someone existed who could match them in battle.

But now, they found that it didn't matter if it were them, or other Chosen from the Southern Domain, they were all simply foils that accentuated the magnificence of Fang Mu.

Even if they grew more powerful, even if they could be considered Chosen within their various Sects, all of them... were merely ordinary when compared to Fang Mu.

Fang Mu floated like a blazing sun in the sky. He was too bright, dazzling, causing all the surrounding stars to fade. They might be unwilling, they might be unconvinced, but it didn't matter. They had no choice....

An inhuman Cultivator had appeared in the Foundation Establishment stage who could exterminate Core Formation Cultivators. Everyone of his generation had no choice but to be shaken and feel suppressed.

Wang Lihai's face was pale, and he stood there silently. Han Shandao shook his head with a bitter smile and sighed inwardly. The Golden Frost Sect Dao Child, Song Yunshu of the Song Clan, and the others of various clans who considered themselves to be at the peak of Foundation Establishment, all looked up at Meng Hao, their eyes filled with deep veneration.

They were in awe of his Cultivation base, and they revered him for his status as a Furnace Lord of the East Pill Division. Because of all of this, it was impossible for them not to understand that in the future, the name of Fang Mu would be matchless in the Southern Domain. From now on, he would be a critical element within the Southern Domain!

Fame had come with one battle!

All eyes were fixed upon Meng Hao as he floated there in mid-air. No roars filled the air, only silence.

Such silence, such deathly emptiness, usually represents intense fear....

The various Cultivator's eyes' were filled with conflict, shock, reverence, admiration, and envy....

Such a variety of looks seemed to transform into a sharpness which

circulated around Meng Hao. In fact, if Meng Hao hesitated at all, it seemed like the sharpness might transform into killing.

Meng Hao's astonishing power caused many hearts to fill with a disastrous level of jealousy. This was one of the reasons he had chosen to change his appearance so often in the past, and had been so careful to not accidentally reveal himself.

If it weren't for the fact that this battle had been key to his breakthrough, then he would never have openly revealed so much about himself.

The death of the azure-masked Cultivator would not be closely investigated. Neither the Black Lands Dao Children nor the azure-masked Cultivators would look into the matter too closely, not with Meng Hao at the height of his power, and surrounded by the shocked Southern Domain Cultivators.

However... he was in a precarious situation. The looks being cast by many of the surrounding Cultivators caused the two azure-masked Cultivators' eyes to glitter slightly.

Their gazes came to fall on Meng Hao. So did that of Wang Lihai, Dao Child of the Wang Clan. His right hand seemed to be resting casually at his side, but only he knew that he was slowly preparing the Wang Clan's Vermillion Bird Three Fingers.

Han Shandao of the Solitary Sword Sect narrowed his eyes. Even his normally forthright face began to fill with a slightly sinister expression.

The Golden Frost Sect Dao Child, as well as the Chosen from the other Sects, had all been defeated by Meng Hao recently. Their eyes began to flicker as they looked at him too.

They didn't dare to attack... although, if they knew he was Meng Hao, then surely they wouldn't have so many misgivings. The Black Lands Cultivators would have none whatsoever, and would definitely immediately attack. However, this wasn't Meng Hao... this was Fang Mu!

A Furnace Lord from the East Pill Division of the Violet Fate Sect!

As people grow in life, they form nets to fall back on. To avoid the problems that result from killing someone, you must first sever that person's nets. That is the only way to prevent future consequences. Acting in any other way is equivalent to killing oneself.

Before, Meng Hao was only Meng Hao. He had no such nets, and as such, anyone who wished to kill him could simply attack.

But now, his identity as a member of the East Pill Division was his biggest safety net.

Meng Hao gained enlightenment of this when he had first joined the Reliance Sect. Having someone to rely on is in fact one of the greatest safety nets that can exist in a person's life.

Wang Lihai didn't make a move. However, one of the other Wang Clan Chosen suddenly took a step toward Meng Hao.

That step seemed to fall upon the hearts of the surrounding Cultivators. Luo Chong suddenly moved!

The two Black Lands azure-masked Cultivators also began to advance...

Amidst the stifling deathly silence, the seemingly peaceful scene was actually filled with incredible danger. As Meng Hao floated in mid-air, his closed eyes suddenly snapped open.

The instant this happened, the Wang Clan Chosen stopped in his tracks. Luo Chong also stopped moving, as did the two azure-masked Cultivators.

Everyone looked at Meng Hao, their looks even more thoughtful than before.

His expression was the same as ever, cold and detached. The coldness of his gaze was even thicker than before, and deep within could be sensed an aura of ridicule.

Not even the slightest injury could be seen on his body, making it seem as if this wasn't his first time exterminating a Core Formation Cultivator!

He suddenly spoke, his voice cool: "My enlightenment from the Dao Geyser included a divine ability. I am a Furnace Lord of the East Pill

Division, unfamiliar with magical battle. However, because of the profundity of the enlightenment, I was unable to control myself. Fellow Daoists from the Black Lands, please forgive me.” With that, he waved his hand, causing his azure-colored robe to disappear. It was replaced with the alchemist’s robe of a Violet Fate Sect Furnace Lord, black, with a faint violet aura glowing within. The sight of it instantly caused everyone to be filled with shock.

He floated there in mid-air, looking coolly about at the crowds of people.

It seemed as if an appointed time had arrived. The two azure-masked Cultivators gave deep looks to Meng Hao, then turned and transformed into beams of light that shot off into the distance. Apparently, Meng Hao’s identity as a Furnace Lord was their greatest misgiving. It was well known that anyone who trifled with one of Pill Demon’s alchemists could arouse the wrath of the entire Sect!

Luo Chong and Xu Fei gave a final glance at Meng Hao, and then departed.

The departure of the Black Lands Cultivators caused the previously stifling atmosphere among the Southern Domain Cultivators to slowly relax. The pressure eased, and they began to grow excited. Even as everyone began to discuss this Fang Mu, Meng Hao clasped hands and bowed deeply to everyone.

“Many thanks for your assistance, Fellow Daoists,” he said. “I, Fang Mu, am very moved. Now, I need to deeply analyze and meditate upon my recent enlightenment. Furthermore, I recently received orders from the Sect, calling me back. Next time you are able, call on me in the Violet Fate Sect, I will most happily receive and entertain you.” With that, he gave another deep bow. Most of the surrounding Cultivators understood that as a Foundation Establishment Cultivator, it was an astonishing thing to have slain a Core Formation Cultivator. Of course, the divine ability which had appeared was a projection of some magical item that no one had actually seen. Clearly, he had incredibly mysterious magical techniques and divine abilities at his disposal.

The confidence instilled by this achievement in battle would give birth to an ever-present confidence. It would help in everything in the future, be it in terms of cultivation or magical techniques.

As they digested his words, Meng Hao once again clasped hands to the Dao Children of the various Sects and Clans, thanking them deeply for their assistance. Clearly having no intention of staying behind any longer, he turned into a beam of light that shot off into the distance.

Wang Lihai and the others frowned as they watched Meng Hao disappear. They had no choice but to eventually just look away. Now as before, there was no way for them to truly understand the level of Meng Hao's profundity. Because of the Violet Fate Sect, it was impossible for them to make any rash moves. They could only sigh inwardly.

Meng Hao flew away at top speed. After a day passed, his face was completely pale, and he coughed up a mouthful of blood. His Qi was incredibly weak. Gritting his teeth, he found the mountain where... he had just recently spent so much time in secluded meditation.

He entered the Immortal's Cave, coughing up more blood, and immediately sat down cross-legged. Popping a medicinal pill into his mouth, he waved his sleeve, sending out a vast amount of poison pills. They immediately turned into a mist which completely surrounded him.

Chapter 276: Stop Fooling Around

Meng Hao's face was pale as he sat cross-legged in the Immortal's Cave. A few days later, he finally opened his eyes. They shone with a brilliant light. However, his brow remained furrowed for quite some time before finally relaxing.

"I injured my soul...." he murmured. He could sense a sinister coldness within him, an iciness which filled him through and through. In the cultivation of Foundation Establishment, the Cultivation base is related to the Dao Pillars. Spiritual Sense is born, as well as the Sea of Perception and the Cultivation soul.

That soul would become the foundation for the future Nascent Soul.

Right now, though, Meng Hao could faintly sense that his soul had been pulled out of place, a price paid for the use of the flag of three streamers. Such an injury would be difficult to recover from. An injury of the flesh would naturally recover through rest and recuperation, or through the use of medicinal pills. However, an injury of the soul could not be healed in such a way.

Battling and slaying Core Formation had been an impressive feat, but as far as Meng Hao was concerned, the level of difficulty was far too high. Even with a tenth Dao Pillar, it had been extremely difficult.

There was simply too great a difference between Foundation Establishment Cultivators and Core Formation Cultivators, especially those who had cultivated Core Qi. In truth, he was not really qualified to challenge a Core Formation Cultivator.

Even with a Perfect Foundation and eight Dao Pillars, his fight with the azure-masked Cultivator had been too challenging. He had used every trick he could think of just to hold his opponent off. It seemed as if he hadn't been defeated, but in truth, the power had existed to destroy him. If any more time had passed, then he would have been vanquished in spectacular fashion.

Thankfully, his ninth Dao Pillar had appeared, and then the situation

changed for the better. Of course, that is what Meng Hao had been aiming for; the intense life or death struggle was what had caused the Qi in his body to multiply, enabling him to break through the bottleneck and increase his Cultivation base!

The need for battle was what had prompted Meng Hao to attack in the first place!

Without the tenth Dao Pillar, and completing the great circle of the Perfect Foundation, he would have been incapable of killing the Core Formation Cultivator. At best, he would have been able to fight a bit longer.

Once the tenth Dao Pillar appeared, however, the vast gap between Foundation Establishment and Core Formation, which was like that between Heaven and Earth, had been narrowed by perhaps half.

That jump caused the battle prowess of his Cultivation base to leap up, far exceeding that of Foundation Establishment, and approaching Core Formation.

The fact was, even with power reaching halfway to Core Formation, the most he could do would be to tangle with a Core Formation Cultivator. He would never be able to slay one. Similarly, although his opponent would occupy a superior position, they wouldn't find it easy to slay him.

What had truly changed the tide had been the flag of three streamers, that precious treasure which resided inside the blood-colored mask.

The treasure had existed for an indeterminable period of time within the Blood Immortal Legacy zone. One of its streamers was sealed with the character Ji. Its power was clearly enough to shake Heaven and Earth, and the Blood Immortal of the Ancient Doom Clan had desired to use it to drink the blood of the Ji!

Meng Hao remembered the meat jelly's shocked reaction upon first seeing the flag. Considering all of that, how could Meng Hao not realize how astounding it was?

In reality, he did not have the requisite Cultivation base to even touch

the treasure, let alone employ its power. However, once his tenth Dao Pillar appeared, he had been able to sense the parched call of the flag of three streamers.

Now that he thought back, he realized that its thirst... was a thirst for destruction!

In fact, instead of saying that Meng Hao had employed the power of the flag of three streamers, it would be more accurate to say because of Meng Hao's new qualifications, the flag was able to borrow his hands and his power to appear once again in the sky.

Furthermore, instead of saying that Meng Hao had slain a Core Formation Cultivator, it would be more accurate to say that the flag of three streamers was the one to exterminate the azure-masked Cultivator!

Even the appearance of just one of the flag's three streamers caused Meng Hao's Cultivation base to wither, and had injured his soul. That moment in which he had hovered in mid-air, facing down the Black Lands Cultivators and the crowds from the Southern Domain, everything about him had appeared normal. In reality, he had been extremely weak.

Thanks to the transformation powers of the meat jelly, he had been able to force out the sensation of a powerful Qi. No one had been able to sense even the slightest clue as to his true state. Considering that and their other misgivings, no one had dared to make a move against him.

In addition, the flag of three streamers hadn't even fully appeared. It had only been a phantom image that appeared to be a divine ability. Therefore, most people had assumed that it was not a magical treasure, but some technique. Furthermore, no one had made a connection between him drying up the Dao Geyser, and the appearance of the flag.

Upon waking up just now, he had spit up a glob of impure Qi, and his eyes had begun to shine. His Cultivation base was now recovered by eighty to ninety percent. Based on how fast it was going, it wouldn't be long before it was completely recovered. The injury to his soul, however, was impossible to deal with. He could only exercise caution and not cause any further injury.

“Injuring the soul is like sowing Karma. If the day comes in which I can break into the Nascent Soul stage, then the Karma will be reaped.” Meng Hao sat there thoughtfully for a moment, then took a deep breath and slowly stood up. He walked out of the Immortal’s Cave to find that it was raining again. The murmuring rain carried with it the cold of autumn. Meng Hao stared off into the distance, his long azure robe fluttering in the rainy wind.

“Core Formation....” His eyes glittered. There was really no need to think of the difficulty of reaching the Nascent Soul Stage. Suddenly, he thought of Wang Tengfei’s Dao Protector, the Core Formation Cultivator Wang Xifan.

All those years ago, a mere glance from him had nearly killed Meng Hao. As of now, Meng Hao was confident that if he faced him again, the man would be stunned.

Lost in thought, Meng Hao recalled Grand Elder Ouyang and He Luohua from the Reliance Sect. He also thought of the other Core Formation Cultivators from the State of Zhao. Gradually, his eyes began to gleam.

“I have ten Dao Pillars and a perfect Foundation. I can even battle the Core Formation stage.... I may be cut off from the spiritual power of Heaven and Earth, but in return, I am the most powerful person in this stage! I must continue down this path! I have a Perfect Foundation, next is... a Perfect Gold Core!” The thought of it left him panting. “As for the injury to my soul, that will just have to wait until later.” He was no longer the youngster he had been when he began practicing cultivation, and now had much deeper comprehension of all that was involved with it. For example, he now knew that in the cultivation world of the Southern Domain, the Core Formation stage was divided into three levels. Violet as placed on top, beneath which were Orange, Crimson and Green; at the very bottom as Mixed.

Based on various methods, and the variety of latent talent, different Cores could be formed. For instance, the Violet Fate Sect’s Violet Qi from the East was able to produce a Violet Core. As for other Sects and Clans, they naturally had their own secret magics that gave their Chosen

Disciples a chance to produce a Violet Core.

Different Cores would produce different Core Qi. Of course, the higher the level of the Core, the more likely it would be to produce Core Qi, and sooner. Obviously, the Core Qi would be much more powerful as well.

Generally speaking, among Cultivators with a Violet Core, ninety percent would be able to cultivate Core Qi in the early Core Formation stage. For Orange, Crimson and Green Cores, they were monochromatic Cores, and would generally produce Core Qi during the mid Core Formation stage. As for the three azure-masked Black Lands Cultivators, they were obviously Chosen, and had somehow been able to force the superior power of a Violet Core out of their Orange Cores.

Regarding Mixed Cores, they contained a variety of colors and were the lowest of the entire stage.

Of course, Meng Hao knew that when it came to the Perfect Core, it was Gold!

Just as there had been a Perfect Foundation Pill, there was also a Perfect Gold Core Pill. After forming a Violet Core, and then consuming the Perfect Gold Core Pill, he would have a high likelihood of rising to a Gold Core.

When that happened, he would have to face Tribulation Lightning.

Before, such things had been far away for Meng Hao, but now that he had ten Perfect Dao Pillars and had completed the great circle of the Perfect Foundation, Core Formation was just around the corner.

He looked thoughtfully out into the windy rain. Finally, he flicked his sleeve to gather together the poison mist from within the Immortal's Cave. It collected into the palm of his hand, after which he placed it into his bag of holding. Then, his body flickered as he moved off into the distance.

Several days later, Meng Hao hovered in mid-air, frowning. On his head, the meat jelly, transformed into a hat, was jabbering on and on. "Bullies. Three bullies. Meng Hao, you're picking on me! You've taken advantage of

my feelings. You're taking advantage of my assistance...."

It had come out two days ago, relentlessly requesting bullies. However, out here in the western region of the Southern Domain, there were no Cultivators. They'd all left after the disappearance of the Dao Geyser. Meng Hao hadn't been able to find any new bullies.

Therefore... the meat jelly was furious.

"How can you be so immoral, so wrong? It's unconscionable.... My bullies! My three bullies!" The more it talked the more wronged it sounded.

Meng Hao coughed lightly. His face was unsightly, but after all those years, especially after his time in the Violet Fate Sect, he had gotten used to the meat jelly's frequent harassment. Therefore, he simply allowed it to chatter on endlessly.

After three more days of garrulous talking, the meat jelly finally paused for a moment. Meng Hao cleared his throat and began to speak: "Didn't you say once that the parrot can emerge from the copper mirror after I reach Core Formation?" He had been waiting for three days to be able to ask this question.

"Correct!" the meat jelly screeched. "After reaching Core Formation, that damned, evil, shameless, low-down, despicable bastard will appear. I've been waiting for that day for a long time! In this life, I will definitely convert it!" In a frenzy, the meat jelly began to chatter away ceaselessly. Now, instead of blabbering about bullies, it was talking about the mystical parrot.

Meng Hao relaxed a bit. At long last he had figured out a way to handle the meat jelly. All you had to do was keep giving it conversation topics. Usually, one or two topics later, it would forget about what it had been concerned about previously. Leading it back and forth in this way was the easiest method to deal with it.

Meng Hao flew along as the meat jelly hat prattled. The buzzing went on for seven days before it finally paused to rest for a moment.

Before it could, Meng Hao said, “Who do you think is more incredible, you or that parrot?”

It seemed Meng Hao’s words had offended it, and it once again went crazy. Trembling, its fury rose to the heavens. “Me, of course! Obviously it’s grand, handsome, extraordinary, intelligent me! That shameless bastard of a bird is nothing but a bird. I’m gonna to convert it, I’m gonna knock him down!”

“How is the Li Clan Patriarch doing lately?” Meng Hao quickly asked. “Has he been obedient?”

The meat jelly gaped for a moment. “The Li Clan Patriarch? Damnation! Damnation! He hasn’t been obedient at all recently. His immorality, his evil, is without limit! I have to go lecture him for a bit!” It seemed to have suddenly realized how to give vent to all its anger. A bang sound out as it disappeared in a puff of smoke into Meng Hao’s bag of holding and the mask, filled with ardor and sincerity.

Meng Hao was finally able to breathe a long sigh of relief.

“At long last, some peace and quiet....”

He looked around. He didn’t intend to immediately head back to the Violet Fate Sect. Instead, he would visit some Cultivator cities and find some Pill Auctions where he could earn some Spirit Stones.

However, even as he was sizing up the surroundings and figuring out which direction he would travel in, his expression suddenly flickered. He looked down at his bag of holding for a moment, and then pulled out his Furnace Lord medallion. It was emitting a flickering, violet glow. He pressed down on the medallion, and suddenly an archaic voice filled his head.

“Hey kid, have you had enough fun? It’s time to stop fooling around. I want you back in four days. Trial by fire for Violet Furnace Lord promotion begins then in the Celestial Land. The frequency of these trials by fire is completely up to my mood. It starts four days from now, and everyone who joins has a chance to become a Violet Furnace Lord. If you don’t get back ASAP, then you’ll lose your chance to participate.”

Chapter 277: Eastern Emergence

Mountain

Meng Hao opened his eyes and stared blankly at the Furnace Lord medallion for a moment as the voice faded from his mind. For some reason its tone made it seem that whoever was speaking was very familiar with him.

The tone had been one of idle chit-chat, which left Meng Hao even more surprised.

However, the voice was clearly that of a stranger; Meng Hao was sure he had never heard it before.

He frowned for a moment, then transformed into a beam of light and shot forward. Before he had flown very far, he suddenly stopped and looked down at the Furnace Lord medallion. His eyes narrowed for a moment, then began to shine. Within the shining glow were bits of fury.

“I know who that voice belongs to. The only person who has the authority to start a trial by fire for Violet Furnace Lord promotion... completely based on his mood.... Other than the Violet Furnace Lords themselves, the only person who could transmit a message from such a distance is....

“Pill Demon!” Meng Hao ground his teeth. He had really had no option but to go.

“My Bedevilment Pill! My 200,000,000 Spirit Stones....” Thinking about the vast amount of Spirit Stones made Meng Hao’s heart seize with pain. It was as if someone had taken a valuable treasure right out of his pocket and dangled it in front of his face, while he was powerless to resist.

Within the Violet Fate Sect, Pill Demon was the only one other than the Violet Furnace Lords who might possibly know that he was Grandmaster Pill Cauldron. The Bedevilment Pill might be able to fool others, but definitely not Pill Demon.

Considering Pill Demon’s position within the Violet Fate Sect, if he

wanted to know something, it would be virtually impossible to keep the information from him.

Actually, Meng Hao hadn't really done anything to conceal his identity as Grandmaster Pill Cauldron. He had simply not taken the initiative to proclaim who he was. After all, his original intention in participating in the Pill Auction was to increase his reputation a bit. He had never imagined that the Bedevilment Pill would cause such a stir. His subsequent caution had caused the entire Southern Domain to begin to speculate as to who Grandmaster Pill Cauldron really was.

As he looked at the Furnace Lord medallion, he recalled the voice that had just entered his head and let out a soft sigh. Obviously, Pill Demon had known all along that he was Grandmaster Pill Cauldron.

Meng Hao was suddenly furious. "So you knew the whole time that I was famous in all of the Southern Domain. Any Sect would love to have me work for them as Grandmaster Pill Cauldron. In that case, why didn't you give me my Spirit Stones?!"

There was little to do about it, though. Pill Demon was like a Patriarch in the East Pill Division. If he wanted to cheat him, there was really nothing Meng Hao could do about it. He couldn't simply up and demand to have Spirit Stones.

"Back in Yunjie County, the Stewards were always miserly. If they weren't taking advantage of people, they took it as losing money! It seems the same principle exists in the Cultivation world. The more Spirit Stones they have, the stingier they get!" Meng Hao sighed, then once again proceeded forward in a beam of light.

"You owe me 200,000,000 Spirit Stones. Right now I don't even have a single Spirit Stone left...." thought Meng Hao, his face long. When he thought about his empty bag of holding, and the 200,000,000 Spirit Stones, he just couldn't keep his cool.

"Four days to get back to the Sect. I'm much further than four days away right now...." He sped up.

"Trial by fire for promotion to Violet Furnace Lord.... Could batty old Pill

Demon perhaps feel guilty for taking my Spirit Stones, so he's giving me a chance to become a Violet Furnace Lord?" His eyes suddenly began to glitter, and his heart palpitated with eagerness. He knew that becoming a Violet Furnace Lord would come with a host of benefits.

After a thousand years, the Violet Fate Sect currently only had eight Violet Furnace Lords. Finally there would be a ninth....

Meng Hao began to breathe heavily, and he pushed himself even faster.

"Four days.... No matter what, I have to get back to the Sect in four days!" He shot off into the distance, a prismatic beam charging at high speed. He had risen to prominence in the western region. His Cultivation base had climbed to new heights. Now he was being called back to the Sect. All of it seemed to smack of some hidden agenda. He decided not to be concerned about the suddenness of the whole matter.

He sighed again and pushed down his concerns. His Cultivation base was now much different than when he had left the Sect, but he could use the Dao Geyser to explain that. After considering the matter for some time, Meng Hao found it unlikely that the Sect was plotting against him.

After all, the Violet Fate Sect was one of the great Sects of the Southern Domain. If they really harbored ill intentions toward him and deigned to use some sort of tricks on him, then there was nothing he could do about it. They would be able to seize him with little effort.

Besides, he had been in the East Pill Division for more than five years. He understood the Sect fairly well and knew both the exceptional areas of the East Pill Division, as well as its shortcomings.

Thinking of all these things, his apprehension lessened quite a bit. However, he was no less cautious than ever. Taking advantage of every teleportation portal he could, he made his way back toward the Violet Fate Sect.

Every teleportation portal he arrived at belonged to some Sect or Clan. All he had to do was flash his Furnace Lord medallion and they would let him pass. They were happy to let a Furnace Lord use their teleportation devices.

Four days passed in a flash. It was late in the night of the third day, in the moment when dawn of the fourth day was about to break, that Meng Hao, windswept and covered in dust, arrived in the region of the Violet Fate Sect. He had passed through over twenty teleportation portals and had crossed nearly half of the Southern Domain.

“Batty old Pill Demon! If he gets to choose when the trial by fire starts, then why the hell did he pick four days!” Meng Hao wasn’t in a good mood, and was in fact slightly depressed. Anyone who used over twenty teleportation portals in a brief four day period would be just as completely exhausted. Thankfully, he had ten Dao Pillars and much stronger Spiritual Sense. With his previous Cultivation base, being teleported so many times in such a short period of time would have left him painfully exhausted.

Meng Hao would rather have spent the fourth day in meditation and rest, but had no time. The constant flying and use of teleportation portals wasn’t without benefit, though. Because of the constant rotation of his Cultivation base, his ten Dao Pillars were completely stable; he could now break through to Core Formation at any time.

His breathing rough, Meng Hao shot through Violet Fate Sect territory. Dawn light climbed up into the sky as he flew along. Occasionally he would encounter other Cultivators who, upon seeing his clothing, would look shocked, and then respectfully clasp hands and bow to him.

This was Violet Fate Sect territory, so all the other Sects and Clans therein were connected in some way to the Violet Fate Sect. As such, his clothing, and the identity they heralded, garnered deep respect.

Off in the distance, he could see the Violet Fate Sect and the enormous statue of Reverend Violet East. It was still early morning, but Meng Hao was worn out and in a rotten mood. As he approached the Sect, the previously still air suddenly began to ripple.

Meng Hao ignored the ripples, and continued to fly at top speed. The ripples spread out for a moment, and then soundlessly disappeared.

These ripples would instantly slay any Cultivator of the Nascent Soul stage or below who was not of the Violet Fate Sect.

Meng Hao whistled through the air within the Sect. Along the way, he ran into quite a few disciples of the Violet Qi Division. They looked at Meng Hao with expressions of complete astonishment.

Seeing the expressions, Meng Hao got a bad feeling. Suddenly, he turned a corner and found himself face to face with a Chosen disciple he knew from the Violet Qi Division, who immediately said, “Fang Mu, what are you doing back?”

Meng Hao paused for a moment, turning back to look at him. “Hey, Brother Song... I was out of the Sect to gain some experience, but now the training is over....”

“You just got back from training?” was the reply. “You’d better get to Eastern Emergence Mountain as fast as you can. All the Furnace Lords and master alchemists of the East Pill Division headed over there at dawn. The word is that there’s a Violet Furnace Lord trial by fire!”

“Eastern Emergence Mountain?” An image of the mountain immediately appeared in Meng Hao’s mind. It was in the eastern part of the State of Eastern Emergence, quite some distance from the Violet Fate Sect.

“Yeah! The trial by fire for Violet Furnace Lord Promotion has caused a big stir among the other great Sects and Clans. Members of the senior generation arrived quite some time ago to observe the proceedings. You...” As the words were still coming out Song’s mouth, Meng Hao took a deep breath, clasped hands, and then disappeared in a beam of bright light.

He sent his Spiritual Sense out and found that there really were no master alchemists present at all within the East Pill Division. He immediately shot off into the distance.

“Batty old Pill Demon,” he said through gritted teeth, “why can’t you explain things clearly?!” Despite his exhaustion, he shot forward at the highest speed possible.

Eastern Emergence Mountain was the most prominent mountain within the State of Eastern Emergence. It towered up into the sky, and throughout the year, its upper half was enveloped in white clouds that appeared Celestial in nature. Many legends about this mountain existed within the

State of Eastern Emergence.

Its peak was covered with ice and snow; mortals would be incapable of climbing up to such a place. Furthermore, the mountain was guarded year round by Violet Fate Sect Cultivators, making it a restricted area.

Even Violet Fate Sect disciples were not allowed to climb the mountain unless they had a special command medallion. Obviously, outsiders would never be allowed onto the mountain unless some solemn Violet Fate Sect matter was underway.

According to one rumor, ten thousand years ago, the Violet Fate Sect wasn't located where it was now, but rather, on Eastern Emergence Mountain. Eventually, because of various circumstances, the Sect had moved away.

Regardless of that, Eastern Emergence Mountain was under constant guard by the Violet Fate Sect. In fact, it was less of a restricted area and more of a holy place!

Currently, an enormous pill furnace rested on the peak of the mountain. It was covered with countless protruding magical symbols, and emanated an archaic air. An air of Time seemed to spread out from within, an air that felt thousands of years old.

Were Meng Hao here, he would recognize this pill furnace... this was the same one that appeared in illusory form above the East Pill Division, and led into the Violet Fate Celestial Land.

This was the actual pill furnace itself!

Surrounding the pill furnace were the thousand master alchemists of the East Pill division, the one hundred Furnace Lords, and the eight Violet Furnace Lords, including An Zaihai and Lin Hailong.¹ Everyone was here!

Close by were representatives of the other four great Sects, as well as the three great Clans, along with members from other Sects who devoted themselves to alchemy. Elders from all these organizations sat cross-legged atop the mountain peak, waiting.

1. An Zaihai is the Violet Furnace Lord who assessed the Bedevilment Pill in the auction, and knows that Fang Mu is Pill Cauldron. Lin Hailong is the most senior of the Violet Furnace Lords, the one who presided over the meeting with Eternal Mountain.

Chapter 278: The Tenth Candidate

A Violet Furnace Lord promotion was not a grand occasion for the Violet Fate Sect only, but rather the entire Southern Domain as a whole. This was not just because a Violet Furnace Lord represented a peak position of incredible height, but also because...

A promotion to Violet Furnace Lord was actually an apprentice-accepting ceremony of Grandmaster Pill Demon!

Currently, there were eight Violet Furnace Lords in the Violet Fate Sect, and all of them were novitiates of Grandmaster Pill Demon. This ceremony was actually a way of formally becoming an apprentice!

Some disciples, such as Chu Yuyan and Ding Xin, were qualified to directly become Grandmaster Pill Demon's apprentices. However, this generally didn't meet with the approval of the alchemists of the East Pill Division. Alchemists were partial to those who relied on their own hard work, who started out as apprentice alchemists, then worked their way to become master alchemists, Furnace Lords, and then finally apprentices of Grandmaster Pill Demon, by joining the ranks of the Violet Furnace Lords.

Chu Yuyan was a bit different. Because of her skill in pill concocting, she had a good reputation in the East Pill Division. Add in her incredible beauty, and the alchemists were more easily able to accept her.

Despite that, to Chu Yuyan, promotion to Violet Furnace Lord was incredibly important. She stood there in the crowd, her eyes glowing with determination. This was her chance to become a Violet Furnace Lord, and she was determined to succeed.

Her gaze came to rest upon a man who was standing behind one of the Violet Furnace Lords. He was middle-aged, and his face was flawless and handsome. His expression was tranquil, and he wore the robe of a Furnace Lord. A faint medicinal aroma wafted off of him; he was clearly beyond ordinary.

Within his face could be seen a hint of lonely arrogance. His expression and appearance were exactly how Chu Yuyan imagined Grandmaster Pill

Cauldron to be.

“He will be my biggest competition for promotion to Violet Furnace Lord....” she thought with an inward sigh as she looked at him. This proud, aloof man was like a Chosen among the Furnace Lords. His name was Ye Feimu.¹

Among the Furnace Lords, Ye Feimu was well known as having incredible skill in the Dao of alchemy. His skill was the type only seen once in a thousand years, and he was generally acknowledged to be the alchemist most likely to be promoted to Violet Furnace Lord. Upon joining the Sect many years ago, he had immediately caused a huge stir in the East Pill Division. Furthermore, Violet Furnace Lord Ye Yuntian took special notice of his talent and showed him favor. This was mostly because they shared the same surname, Ye.²

With assistance the entire time, he became the number one apprentice alchemist at the time, then the number one master alchemist. Finally, he became a Furnace Lord, whereupon not much was heard about him for many years. According to the rumors, his skill in the Dao of alchemy had reached the peak of the Furnace Lord rank, and he was halfway to being a Violet Furnace Lord already.

Even more stunning was that it wasn't just his Dao of alchemy that was so high; he had long since reached the Core Formation stage. He hadn't cultivated Core Qi yet, but many people speculated that if he hadn't devoted himself so much to alchemy, he would already be above the mid Core Formation stage.

In this Violet Furnace Lord trial by fire, Ye Feimu was viewed as the most likely candidate to win. Second was Chu Yuyan. There were other candidates, but the general consensus was that the main competition would be between these two.

Chu Yuyan had one advantage; she was an apprentice of Pill Demon. As for Ye Feimu, his advantage, which even Chu Yuyan had to acknowledge, was that he had the support of ninety percent of the Furnace Lords, as well as five of the Violet Furnace Lords. In addition, Pill Demon himself

had praised him on past occasions. All of this really put Ye Feimu in a superior position.

Even more importantly, Chosen-like Ye Feimu had been talked a lot about in the past year. More and more people outside the Sect were spreading rumors that... he was Grandmaster Pill Cauldron!

Ye Feimu never made any comments on the subject, which of course caused even more rumors to spread. Soon, everyone was convinced that Pill Cauldron was none other than Ye Feimu.

In fact, many people felt that the reason he sealed his pill with the cauldron (鼎) was because of his name, Feimu (非目)!

The characters 非 and 目 can both be seen in the character 鼎!

Even many of the Furnace Lords agreed with this, as well as a few of the Violet Furnace Lords, who began to pay closer attention to him because of it.

Chu Yuyan was very focused on the matter of Pill Cauldron. She had even gone to visit Ye Feimu to ask about it. While he hadn't openly admitted that he was Pill Cauldron, he had vaguely implied that such was the case. How could Chu Yuyan not have understood his meaning?

After finally resolving the issue, she actually felt a little bit disappointed. It was an indescribable feeling, sort of like waking to find that reality was very different from the dream world you had just been in.

“Even if he is Grandmaster Pill Cauldron, I will fight with everything I have to become a Violet Furnace Lord,” she thought, taking a deep breath and deepening her resolve. For some strange reason, as soon as she made her mind up, the image of another person suddenly appeared in her mind. Fang Mu.

“Why am I thinking about him...?” She frowned, dispelling the image of Fang Mu from her thoughts.

It was early morning on Eastern Emergence Mountain. Cool sunlight fell upon the snowy mountain peak. The enormous pill furnace emitted an archaic aura of Time, and the surroundings were very quiet.

The eight Violet Furnace Lords of the East Pill Division sat cross-legged. Behind them were the Furnace Lords and master alchemists, over a thousand people altogether.

Also present off to the side were representatives from the other Sects and Clans, here to observe the ceremonies. If someone was promoted to Violet Furnace Lord, they would witness the event and then announce throughout the Southern Domain that there was a ninth Violet Furnace Lord, and that Grandmaster Pill Demon had accepted a new apprentice.

“The hour has arrived!” cried Lin Hailong, the most senior of the Violet Furnace Lords.

As soon as his words rang out, the sound of bells filled the mountain peak. The clouds above roiled, forming together to form an ancient-looking face that stared down at everyone.

At the same time, the enormous pill furnace began to emit a gentle glow. Multi-colored beams of light shot out, twisting around to fill the entire area with brightness.

From off in the distance, it looked as if the entirety of Eastern Emergence Mountain was covered by a massive, illusory pill furnace.

Ripples appeared in the air, out from which a figure emerged to stand atop the pill furnace. He wore a white robe, and his features were ordinary; however, his aura was anything but. He gave off a sense of ultimate refinement.

The air around him distorted as he appeared, as if he didn't quite belong in the world.

The sleeves of his simple robe were embroidered with images of pill furnaces. His hair was white, and his gaze soft as he looked around at everyone. A smile appeared on his archaic face.

“Fellow Daoists of the Southern Domain, many thanks for coming to attend my ceremony of accepting a new apprentice. I am unable to attend in person, so I've embodied my Divine Will to come in my place. I hope you can all forgive me for this.” This of course was the man who occupied

the ultimate position in the Dao of alchemy in the Southern Domain, Grandmaster Pill Demon.

His voice caused all the disciples of the East Pill Division to salute respectfully, including master alchemists, Furnace Lords and Violet Furnace Lords. Grandmaster Pill Demon was essentially the Patriarch of the East Pill Division.

Grandmaster Eternal Mountain hadn't come, but instead, Grand Elder Xiao Xifeng, whose Cultivation base was at the great circle of the late Nascent Soul stage. He laughed, then coolly said, "No need to be so polite, Grandmaster Pill Demon. Accepting an apprentice and promoting a Violet Furnace Lord is a grand event for the entire Southern Domain, I, Xiao wouldn't think of not coming."

He occupied a noble and prestigious position within the Golden Frost Sect, and was nearly nine hundred years old, making him a sub-Patriarch. He was not yet one thousand years old, and had not defied the Heavens. If in the next hundred years he could break through to the Spirit Severing stage, then he would truly become a Patriarch.

If not, then he would simply pass away in meditation and become one with the Dao.

Next to him were ten or more Golden Frost Sect Cultivators, including Fatty. Right now, Fatty looked extremely nervous, and didn't show the slightest hint of being lively or excited. In fact, he was acting unprecedentedly well-behaved.

The person he feared the most in the entire Golden Frost Sect was none other than Grand Elder Xiao.

"After hearing that Grandmaster Pill Demon was accepting a new apprentice, I came as fast as possible," said Patriarch Violet Sieve of the Black Sieve Sect, smiling. "Thankfully, I didn't arrive late."

He sat cross-legged off to the side. Next to him was Zhou Jie as well as Han Bei, who was currently looking around, sizing up the surroundings. It seemed as if she were looking for someone.

A Violet Furnace Lord promotion was a huge event, something that hadn't occurred for a very long time. It was only natural for the other great Sects to show up. Also present was Daoist Wu Sheng, second of the Solitary Sword Sect's Three Sword Dao Lords, who sat cross-legged, surrounded by Solitary Sword Sect disciples. Chen Fan was there, as was the woman Shan Ling.³

With a slight smile, Daoist Wu Sheng said, "You're truly too polite, Grandmaster Pill Demon. For a Grandmaster to accept an apprentice is a legacy of the Dao of alchemy that any disciple in the Southern Domain would covet. How could I not humbly come to bear witness to such an event?" His voice was calm. He was an honored senior member of the Solitary Sword Sect who was qualified to look down on a myriad of other Sects. However, in front of Grandmaster Pill Demon, all of his pride turned into respect.

The representative from the Blood Demon Sect was a withered old man in a red Daoist robe. He had silver hair, and his skin was shriveled; he emanated a thick Death Qi, and his eyes had no pupils; they were completely white.

He didn't say anything in response to Pill Demon's words. He merely smiled and nodded his head.

This blind old man was incredibly famous in the Southern Domain. He was the third Demon of the Blood Demon Sect, Tu Luo, the Corpse Demon! The only other person from the Blood Demon Sect to come to Eastern Emergence Mountain was Li Shiqi.

The main representatives from the three great Clans were all of the great circle of the Nascent Soul stage. All of them said various words in response to Grandmaster Pill Demon.

Afterwards Grandmaster Pill Demon smiled and said, "In total, there will be ten Cultivators participating in the Violet Furnace Lord trial by fire. Candidates, please step forward." His voice was solemn, and as it filled the mountain top, Chu Yuyan, Ye Feimu, and seven other Furnace Lords stepped out from the crowd one by one. They walked over to stand in front

of the pill furnace.

Including Chu Yuyan and Ye Feimu, there were only nine alchemists standing there, not the ten of which Pill Demon spoken. The Cultivators of the East Pill Division immediately noticed this, as did the representatives of the other Sects.

Chu Yuyan and the other candidates for Violet Furnace Lord Promotion exchanged glances, silently wondering who the tenth participant was.

Before anyone could say anything, a beam of light appeared in the distance. It shot through the air toward the mountain peak, then transformed into a panting Meng Hao. Everyone looked over at him, although he didn't care about that. He glanced around, and immediately noticed Chu Yuyan and the other eight standing in front of the pill furnace, as well as Grandmaster Pill Demon.

As far as Meng Hao was concerned, Pill Demon was just some old man that he didn't recognize.

"The tenth candidate has arrived," said Grandmaster Pill Demon, his expression the same as ever. "Fang Mu, step on over."

Hearing this, Meng Hao walked over without hesitation to join the other nine. Then he looked up at Pill Demon, bottling up his frustration and helplessness.

*

1. Ye Feimu's name in Chinese is 叶非目 Yè fēi mù – Ye is a surname which also means "leaf." Fei is a negation word that basically means "not." Mu means "eye".
2. Ye Yuntian's name in Chinese is 叶云天 yè yún tiān – Ye is a surname which also means "leaf." Yun means "cloud." Tian means "sky" or "heaven".
3. Shan Ling was introduced way back in chapter 180.

Chapter 279: Opening the Pill Furnace

The voice that Meng Hao had just heard was exactly the same voice he had heard coming from the Furnace Lord medallion four days ago. Considering that, as well as the expressions on everyone's faces, how could Meng Hao not come to the conclusion that... this person was none other than the illustrious Grandmaster Pill Demon.

In Meng Hao's eyes, Grandmaster Pill Demon looked completely ordinary. He did not possess the demeanor of a transcendent being, nor did he emanate some powerful, domineering fierceness. He looked just like a regular old man.

Then... Meng Hao thought about the 200,000,000 Spirit Stones, and his mood worsened. Of course, he couldn't mention anything about that now. Next, he thought about how he had been told to return in four days, but hadn't been told where to go. He had rushed over to the Sect only to be forced to scramble back in the opposite direction. It had left him completely drained.

All of these depressing thoughts caused Meng Hao's expression to flicker with a bit of anger and frustration.

Chu Yuyan looked at him and let out a light snort. She looked away, ignoring him, gazing instead at Ye Feimu. Meng Hao stood there by himself, silently.

Most of the other seven just glanced at him, and then paid him no further attention as they focused on not allowing excitement regarding the Violet Furnace Lord promotion to show on their face.

An Zaihai looked over at Meng Hao, and a barely perceptible smile touched his face. He knew that Fang Mu was Grandmaster Pill Cauldron, and he also knew how his Master felt about the young man. Pill Demon had given Fang Mu free reign to enjoy himself in the Sect, and as far as the identity of Grandmaster Pill Cauldron, if Fang Mu wanted to reveal it himself, he could. If he didn't want to, that was his business.

As far as the representatives from the other Sects and Clans, Patriarch

Violet Sieve was the first one to give a friendly nod to Meng Hao. Zhou Jie's face was expressionless, but when Han Bei looked at him, she smiled, her face as beautiful as a flower. The look she gave him was noticed by quite a few others. Chu Yuyan glanced over and saw it, and then frowned, although she wasn't sure why. For some reason, she just was not in a good mood.

Fatty's eyes were wide as he looked at Meng Hao, then Chu Yuyan and then back to Meng Hao. Finally he glanced at Han Bei out of the corner of his eyes, and his expression filled with admiration. As for what he was thinking, only he himself knew.

The representative from the Wang Clan was an old woman, her face covered with wrinkles. "So, this is the Alchemist Fang who rose to fame a few days ago in the western region." Behind the old woman, other Wang Clan members sat cross-legged, including Wang Tengfei.

His expression was somber, and the entire time, he hadn't even looked once at Chu Yuyan. She reacted to this with utmost calm, and not the least bit of negativity. It seemed as if she had placed the matters from previous years completely behind her.

"A hero at such a young age!" someone laughed from within the Song Clan representatives. It was none other than Eccentric Song, who sat far off toward the edge. He laughed again as he looked Meng Hao up and down, measuring him up.

Sitting around him were a dozen or so members of the Song Clan. Song Yunshu wasn't there, but Song Jia was. She, of course was... Meng Hao's fiancé, at least theoretically speaking. There she was sitting right next to Eccentric Song. Meng Hao hadn't seen her for years now. She was slim and graceful, with an elegant expression on her face. She was beautiful, like an orchid in full bloom.

However, there was a slight furrow in her brow caused by years of gloomy thoughts. It made her entire person seem like an orchid, but a dark one.

The Li Clan representative was a senior member of the Clan, Li

Guobang, who was over five hundred years of age, and had a Cultivation base at the late Nascent Soul stage. He was incredibly powerful and influential within the Li Clan. “Congratulations, Grandmaster Pill Demon, your Violet Fate Sect really has produced some amazing disciples!”

Sitting next to Li Guobang amidst the other Li Clan disciples, was Li Daoyi, who frowned as he looked over at Meng Hao.

Grandmaster Pill Demon smiled, but didn’t respond to any of the comments. He looked over Meng Hao and the nine others.

“Hailong, please explain the rules.” With that, he stepped off to the side and sat down cross-legged.

Lin Hailong, the most senior ranking of the Violet Furnace Lords, hastily stood up. He clasped hands and bowed to Grandmaster Pill Demon, then turned toward Meng Hao and the others.

“Violet Furnace Lord promotion is about more than just collecting medicinal plants, concocting pills, memorizing formulas, testing the Cultivation base and gauging the Dao of alchemy. It is a trial by fire! I myself have experienced this trial by fire, as have all of the other Violet Furnace Lords you see here today. Only by rising above your peers can you achieve the rank of Violet Furnace Lord!

“However.... since ancient times, the East Pill Division of the Violet Fate Sect has held a Violet Furnace Lord test seventy-nine times. Down to this day, only seventeen of those tests resulted in a successful promotion. In other words, in the other sixty-two tests, all the candidates failed, unable to make the furnace turn violet. Therefore, despite being qualified to participate in this trial by fire, there is a seventy percent possibility that you will fail.” A serious look was written on his face as he slowly looked over Meng Hao and the others, one by one.

Meng Hao’s face was placid. He was physically tired, but also excited. He had previously read that throughout the history of the Violet Fate Sect, there had only been seventeen alchemists promoted to Violet Furnace Lord. Two of them ended up forsaking the Sect, one of whom was Eternal Mountain; the other was surnamed Liu.

Of the fifteen others, in the past thousand years, five had perished. Two left the Sect to gain experience, and then disappeared without a trace. Grandmaster Pill Demon had personally searched for them, but hadn't been able to turn up a single clue. The only thing he was certain of was that they weren't dead. For some reason, though, they had disappeared from the Southern Domain.

Lin Hailong continued: "Even if you fail, you will be able to seize luck within the test. During the Violet Furnace Lord trial by fire, your life will not be in any danger. But... you may only participate in this test once in your life. If you fail, you will never get a second chance!

"Therefore, since ancient times, many alchemists have left personally created pill formulas and other personal information about the Dao of alchemy within the test. These things have been passed down within the test for many years, available only to those qualified to participate in the test. For example, I remember how I personally left behind information regarding my understanding and speculations of the Three Mortalities Pill...." Lin Hailong's eyes filled with a look of recollection for a moment.

"The location of the trial by fire is a mountain in the Celestial Land. At the base of the mountain is the Mother of Furnaces. This Mother of Furnaces is the first stroke of luck the ten of you will encounter. Inside, you will find your own Life Furnace. More precisely, at the same time that you select a furnace, that furnace will be selecting you! To complete the test, you must make your Life Furnace turn violet. If you do that, and are able to ascend to the peak of the mountain, then you will earn the right to be called Violet Furnace Lord!

"Unfortunately, only one person can earn such a right. If more than one person is able to reach the peak, then the final decision will be made by the Furnace Lords and the Violet Furnace Lords. Their approval will be critical in the decision of who becomes the next Violet Furnace Lord!"

Lin Hailong gave deep, meaningful looks to Meng Hao and the others as he spoke his final words: "The pill furnace behind you is a precious treasure forged thousands upon thousands of years ago by Reverend Violet East. Inside is a Celestial Land, and a towering Celestial Mountain.

There are ten paths on the mountain, which is divided into four regions. Each of the four regions contains different trials and tests. Use your Dao of alchemy to pass through them. Based on your achievements, the color of your furnaces will darken. I must remind you, everything you do within the trial by fire will be seen clearly by everyone on the outside.... Do your best. I truly hope that this trial by fire will result in one of you becoming... my Ninth Junior Brother in the East Pill Division!" With that, he turned to look at Pill Demon. Pill Demon gave a slight nod.

Lin Hailong flicked his wide sleeve and said, "Chant the Alchemy Scripture to open the Pill Furnace!" As his voice rang out, the eyes of all the alchemists, Furnace Lord and Violet Furnace Lord alike, immediately closed. Their lips moved slightly, and an indistinct sound filled the air. It was impossible to understand or hear clearly. Even a Nascent Soul Cultivator wouldn't be able to comprehend it.

Only alchemists of the East Pill Division would be able to make out that this mysterious so-called Alchemy Scripture was none other than the Alchemy Dao Transmutation Incantation!

Seemingly in sync with the droning sound, Eastern Emergence Mountain began to shake. Multicolored light spread out everywhere, filling the sky. Countless faces suddenly appeared within the clouds, their expressions dignified. From their mouths emerged indistinct symbols. The sound echoed about, causing the sky to be filled with bright colors.

The land around the mountain was peaceful. However, a mist sprang up, with Eastern Emergence Mountain at its center. It roiled out rapidly, quickly covering the entire State of Eastern Emergence. All the land and all the living things in it were submerged within the mist.

As the mist spread out, Violet Qi Division disciples flew out in all directions to keep guard and maintain peace.

Up in the sky, colorful lights danced about, beneath which, clouds and mist covered the land like a sea. Eastern Emergence Mountain rose up from it like an island, towering up. Far off in the distance, the enormous statue of Reverend Violet East also towered up above the sea of clouds,

looking, not like a mountain, but an enormous giant watching over the land.

“The pill furnace is opened. Enter!” cried Lin Hailong.

The pill furnace emitting buzzing sounds. In the blink of an eye, its side began to ripple and grow transparent. It looked almost like a waterfall. Ye Feimu took a deep breath, and then stepped into the pill furnace, the first one to do so. He disappeared into the rippling water, followed by Chu Yuyan, whose eyes radiated determination.

Meng Hao looked back at Grandmaster Pill Demon, who sat there cross-legged, his eyes closed. Without a word, and without the slightest hesitation, he entered the waterfall. Coldness filled his body, and it began to grow transparent. He disappeared.

The other seven candidates entered as well, vanishing immediately. Although it might seem like these seven were people of little note, in reality, to be qualified to participate in the trial by fire showed how extraordinary they were. Such qualifications meant that they were inherently famous, the best of the best in terms of both personality and the Dao of alchemy!

Chapter 280: Life Furnace?

Violet Fate Celestial Land. The holiest place in the Sect.

There were many legends regarding this particular Celestial Land. All of them, however, had something to do with the almighty Reverend Violet East, who had founded the Sect tens of thousands of years ago.

Many years after the Sect's Founding, this Celestial Land gradually came to be the location where the Violet Fate Sect grew its medicinal herbs. Eventually more types of medicinal plants came to grow there than in the entire rest of the Southern Domain put together.

That was the location of the East Pill Division's Dao Reserve. Within the Violet Fate Celestial Land, at the far end of the limitless stretches of medicinal plant fields, was a mountain so tall it seemed to have no top!

This mountain, which could be seen from an incredible distance, was known as Violet East Mountain!

According to one legend, in his later years, Reverend Violet East sat atop this mountain and slowly passed away in meditation... afterward it became a place of pilgrimage.

At the foot of the mountain was an enormous pill furnace glowing with a seven-colored light. It looked exactly the same as the furnace on top of Eastern Emergence Mountain, except somehow more real. It emanated an archaic Qi.

Suddenly, the air at the foot of the mountain began to ripple like liquid. Multiple figures emerged, and when the ripples faded away, Meng Hao, Chu Yuyan, Ye Feimu and the others were all there.

In front of them was the shockingly high mountain. Starting at the foot of the mountain, ten small paths zigzagged up toward the top. Each path began there, and then took different routes to the top.

As to which path to select, that would be based on the feeling each candidate got from the paths. In any case, it was easy to see that there was little difference in the difficulty of traversing the various paths.

Meng Hao looked up toward the peak of the imposing mountain. Its higher regions were blurry, and it was actually impossible to see the peak itself. Nor was it actually possible to even estimate how tall the mountain was.

Meng Hao wasn't the only one looking up at it. The other nine people around him, including Chu Yuyan and Ye Feimu, were gazing toward it.

Other than the ten paths, the main thing that filled their vision was the enormous pill furnace!

After some time passed, Ye Feimu's eyes glittered with determination. He turned to glance over at the others. His gaze did not come to rest upon any of them. His supercilious expression seemed to say that he knew he would become a Violet Furnace Lord, and that none of the other candidates were able to match up to him.

His pride and dignity seemed to fill him with one hundred percent confidence that this title of Violet Furnace Lord belonged only to him!

He shot toward the pill furnace and sat down cross-legged in the spot directly east of it.

Chu Yuyan looked at him and took a deep breath. Her eyes also filled with the glow of determination.

"You might be Grandmaster Pill Cauldron, who I admire so much, but now the time has come for me to go up against you...." Closing her eyes, she sat down next to the Pill Furnace.

After her, Meng Hao and the others approached and selected various positions to sit down. The first phase of the competition had begun; it was time for the candidates to acquire their Life Furnaces!!

Meng Hao had no clue how to actually get the furnace. However, as soon as the ten of them sat down cross-legged around the seven-colored pill furnace, the glow around it began to flicker, and then suddenly shot out toward the candidates.

A tremor ran through Meng Hao's body, and he suddenly sensed something calling to him, murmuring within his mind. He reached out to

touch it with Spiritual Sense, and suddenly his mind reeled, and he felt as if he had lost contact with his body.

He could no longer see the mountain or the Celestial Land. Instead, a strange world stretched out in front of his eyes.

It was boundless and filled with curling mists. A six-colored glow was everywhere, a glow that was missing the color violet. It pierced through the mists, shining everywhere. Meng Hao looked at everything mutely. He couldn't feel his body, but he was somehow there. He suddenly realized that by concentrating, he could move.

His body was not here in this world, only his will. The world sped by in front of him as he shot through the mists. As he moved, occasional beams of bright light would shoot past him.

It seemed like this place had no end. Everything was a blur....

Inside the Celestial Land, beneath the mountain, next to the pill furnace, Meng Hao sat there cross-legged. His expression seemed to be constantly changing, as if he were lost in a dream. All of the others around him looked exactly the same. Their expressions seemed to flicker with surprise, confusion and thoughtfulness.

Meanwhile, outside of the Violet Fate Celestial Land, atop Eastern Emergence Mountain, ten glowing, richly colored screens suddenly blossomed up out of the pill furnace. Images gradually became clear on the screens, depicting each of the people within the trial by fire.

As they sat there cross-legged, their expressions were clearly visible to all of the alchemists of the East Pill Division who sat on the mountaintop, as well as the representatives from the other Sects and Clans who had come to observe the proceedings.

Each and every action of the ten within the Celestial Land was clearly visible to everyone.

The mountaintop was peaceful, and everyone seemed to be dividing their attention between the ten various screens.

Lin Hailong looked at them and murmured to himself, "Every Violet

Furnace Lord trial by fire requires the candidates to proceed through four regions and face four tests. However, before facing the tests, they must acquire their personal Life Furnaces. The Life Furnace is the key... the type of furnace acquired will depend completely on the luck of the alchemist....”

Meng Hao lost track of time as he proceeded on through the endless emptiness. All he could see was mist, and the six-colored glow. There was nothing else.

After a very long time had passed, Meng Hao was starting to feel tired. Suddenly, a violet glow flickered up ahead of him. Meng Hao peered forward. His attention was seized by this violet glow that suddenly appeared in a world which lacked violet.

The violet glow didn't move, but just sat there, flickering. Suddenly, a pill furnace became visible within the glow, about the size of an infant's fist.

Magical symbols circulated around the pill furnace, which emanated a violet light.

Just as Meng Hao's will moved forward to touch the pill furnace, it suddenly shot backward, streaming magical symbols. Before Meng Hao could get any closer, it sped off into the distance.

Meng Hao muttered to himself for a moment, then proceeded forward. Not much time passed before he caught sight of another violet glow, within which was another pill furnace. It looked a bit different than the other one, as it had three legs. However, as Meng Hao approached, it too disappeared off into the distance.

“So,” Meng Hao thought to himself, “I have to select a furnace, and the furnace has to select me....” He decided to stop moving, and instead calmed himself and settled his will. “I'll use my Dao of alchemy to communicate with this world created by the Mother of Furnaces. I will search the emptiness for the Life Furnace that is fated to belong to me....” With that, he figuratively closed his eyes.

Time passed, a very, very long time. Meng Hao gradually grew calmer. Soon, within his mind, he saw nine spheres of will; these nine spheres

were the other candidates within the trial by fire.

He could sense them, and they, in turn, could sense him.

It was a strange feeling. They couldn't see each other, but they could feel each other. Meng Hao and the other nine relied on their Dao of alchemy to sense this world, and to attempt to draw out their own personal Life Furnace.

Gradually, Meng Hao could see one beam of glowing light after another appearing around the other nine people. Chu Yuyan had attracted seven or eight pill furnaces of various colors.

As for Ye Feimu, he had dozens spinning around him; all of them seemed to desire to be selected by him.

The other people had two or three at the minimum.

Meng Hao was the only person who only had one pill furnace in front of him. His heart sank momentarily before he calmed himself.

"In my Dao of alchemy," he thought, "my body is the pill furnace and my heart is the pill formula. Few people can conform to this philosophy, therefore, it is difficult for me to attract a suitable Life Furnace." He began to murmur, sending his will out in all directions. "Pill Furnaces, if you follow me, you will reach the pinnacle. Come with me, and become eternal!"

Suddenly an almost countless number of glowing lights appeared throughout the nothingness of the world. More than ten thousand of them flickered in all corners of the world. The pill furnaces trembled, as if they were reacting to Meng Hao's voice.

"In my Dao of alchemy, my body is the furnace and my heart is the formula. I will refine all the myriads of things in nature; I will refine the transformations of the sun and moon. Such a refining requires a furnace, my Life Furnace. Follow me for a life of transformation...." His will surged out, growing stronger, increasing the number of pill furnaces that reacted to him to over one hundred thousand. Half among them began to quiver violently, seemingly excited, and yet hesitating.

“I vow that whichever pill furnace follows me will never be destroyed. It will never shatter!” His will echoed out, growing even stronger. Among the fifty thousand trembling pill furnaces, ten thousand of them began to emit droning noises.

“I vow that whichever pill furnace follows me will concoct medicinal pills of the stars, and will give birth to Pill Spirit! This is my personal vow!” His will soared, and in that instant, within the ten thousand pill furnaces, one thousand began to drone even louder, and emit even brighter, glittering auras.

“I vow that whichever pill furnace belongs to me, when I achieve my Dao, it will incarnate a body!” His will thundered out. Among the thousand pill furnaces was a violet furnace which suddenly shot out of nowhere, heading directly toward Meng Hao.

Meng Hao formless eyes opened, and in front of him, he saw a nine-legged violet furnace!

It shone with a flickering, violet glow as it floated in the air in front of him. Magical symbols emanated off of it. It was obvious from a mere glance that it was completely beyond ordinary.

“This is the Life Furnace which belongs to me, selected from within the void....” Meng Hao’s eyes shone brightly, and he slowly lifted up his hand to take hold of the furnace. It was at this exact moment that suddenly, a powerful screaming noise shook the entire world.

The pill furnace in front of Meng Hao began to tremble, as did all the pill furnaces hovering around the other nine candidates. They all seemed... terrified....

Something violent and shocking was about to happen!

Chapter 281: ... Rather Die Than Submit!

A black beam of light appeared, streaking toward them from off in the distance. Its speed was almost impossible to describe as it shot toward Chu Yuyan's will and then slammed into some of the pill furnaces which were circling around her. The instant it hit them, they shattered into pieces, which the black beam devoured.

It was with great difficulty that Chu Yuyan had attracted these pill furnaces out of the group of one hundred thousand others. Just as she had found one she had synergy with, the black beam slammed into it and destroyed it. It seemed as if the furnaces didn't dare to flee or evade, like they were allowing the black beam to consume them. It was as if the black beam was an Emperor who had demanded the death of a government official. Of course the official had no choice but to die!

Chu Yuyan's will was instantly shaken.

Not all of the pill furnaces were shattered; there were two or three that the black beam seemed to disregard and leave alone.

An instant later, the black beam shot toward Ye Feimu. It circled around him and the dozens of pill furnaces which he had attracted from out of the hundred thousand. Half of them shattered to pieces and were consumed. The beam then moved on to the others.

All of this takes some time to explain, but the black beam moved in the twinkling of an eye. Next it shot toward Meng Hao. He had no time to snatch the pill furnace which hovered in front of him. The black beam slammed into his violet pill furnace, and it disintegrated and was sucked up by the beam.

Rage instantly billowed up from the depths of Meng Hao's heart. His fury soared to the heavens. He was not like the other candidates who had been able to attract multiple pill furnaces from out of the hundred thousand. To them, losing a few was not a huge matter; they could always select another one that the beam didn't destroy.

However, Meng Hao had expended a lot of effort to persuade the violet

pill furnace to accept him. Then, it was destroyed in the blink of an eye by the black beam. Now he was left without anything at all. How could he not fly into a rage?

This was even more the case when, after destroying Meng Hao's pill furnace, the black beam exuded a will of arrogance, and then shot off into the distance. It seemed as if it were an Emperor surveying his territory, who would kill a few officials here and there and then continue on his way.

Meng Hao could clearly make out the image of a pill furnace within the black beam. It was completely black, and emanated no magical symbols whatsoever. Black was not one of the colors within this world, making it seem completely incompatible, as if it were above all the other pill furnaces.

"Destroy my pill furnace, will you? Fine, my new pill furnace is going to be you!" His fury billowing up, his will suddenly shot into pursuit of the black pill furnace.

At this moment, Meng Hao took the so-called "follow your heart" theory and tossed it out into the void. He also tossed aside the idea of finding the Life Furnace that belonged to him and him alone. This was his personality.

If you destroy Meng Hao's pill furnace, then regardless of the reason you did so, you will pay the price to replace it!

This is Meng Hao. His fury rippled, and his will shot out in pursuit of the black beam.

To add insult to injury, the black pill furnace didn't seem to even notice him. Its level of arrogance was incredible. As it proceeded along its way, it would viciously smash into other random pill furnaces, destroying and consuming them.

It seemed that this pill furnace had its own Spirit, which viewed Meng Hao with contempt and disdain.

Meanwhile, just outside of Violet East Mountain, everyone sat around the Mother of Furnaces. Chu Yuyan opened her eyes; slowly, so did Ye

Feimu and the other seven. As they did, the air above their hands began to glow, and then transformed into pill furnaces.

It didn't matter the color of the pill furnace they had acquired within the illusory world just now. The pill furnaces that appeared in their hands now were white, each and every one of them.

Everyone had awakened except for Meng Hao. He still sat there, eyes closed in meditation, his brow furrowed and his jaw clenched.

Outside of the Celestial Land and the illusory world, everyone, including the Violet Furnace Lords, actually had no way to see what was happening within the Mother of Furnaces. The only thing they could see were the expressions on the faces of Meng Hao and the others. Now, everyone was focused on Meng Hao, and his lack of success.

Chu Yuyan also glanced at him. Not saying a word, she stood and raced toward Violet East Mountain, pill furnace in hand. Ye Feimu's body flashed as he also charged forward, head toward the first of the paths that led up the mountain.

The other seven candidates also silently headed toward Violet East Mountain, each picking a path of their own. As they did, the paths disappeared behind them. Soon, there was only one path left on the mountain, left behind for Meng Hao, who was still in meditation.

Within the illusory world of the furnace, Meng Hao was engaged in mad pursuit of the black beam. It had led him to every corner of the place, and as it did, its contemptuous will seemed to grow stronger and stronger.

Finally, Meng Hao lost his patience, and he gave a cold snort. "Demon Sealing, Eighth Hex!" His senses told him that this world was under some type of sealing, making it impossible for outsiders to be able to tell what was happening inside. Therefore, he held nothing back. His invisible body dissipated, and a part of Meng Hao's soul suddenly appeared amidst endless ripples. The ripples transformed into gossamer strands which immediately shot toward the black pill furnace, entangling it.

The black pill furnace seemed to be frozen in shock. In its memory, it had never encountered anyone who could catch it. Within this world, it

was the sovereign; no one could possibly lay hold of it. And yet, today it had run into a magical technique which was capable of shaking both its will and its pill-furnace form. Immediately, it stopped. It only took the space of two breaths to shake itself free.

However, just as it was about to speed off, an illusory hand appeared out of nowhere and clamped down onto it. Originally, Meng Hao's presence here had been invisible. However, because of the Eighth Demon Sealing Hex, an illusory phantom image of his body could now be seen.

"Where do you think you're running off to?!" he said, locking his grip onto the pill furnace. The black pill furnace began to struggle, sending out massive waves of power. As it did, a face appeared on its surface.

It was the face of an evil, vicious youth. It radiated enmity and hatred, and after it appeared, it glared at Meng Hao and let out a threatening howl.

Meng Hao's eyes glittered with coldness. He lifted up his left hand and slapped the thing right across the face. The slap to the pill furnace's Spirit rang out with a boom. The face was flung to the side, but then spun back around and let out another roar of rage toward Meng Hao.

The roar rose up to the heavens, as if it contained an incredible might within it. The force of it washed over Meng Hao, shaking his will. However, he did not allow his grip on it to weaken in the slightest. Instead, he gave a cold harrumph.

"Fighting back? Well, fighting back won't do you any good!" He lifted his left hand, employing the power of the Eighth Demon Sealing Hex as he pressed his finger down onto the youth's face.

"You consume other pill furnaces? Fine, I don't care. But you dared to consume MY pill furnace. In doing so, you've sown Karma. Now you will reap the Karma, and earn your reward!" His left hand flickered in an incantation as he again employed the power of the Eighth Demon Sealing Hex. Streams of seals flew down onto the pill furnace; it seemed as if it would soon be sealed into complete suppression.

The Spirit of the pill furnace, embodied in the face of the youth,

struggled violently. Its will of hatred grew more powerful than ever; in a frenzy, it opened its mouth and let loose a piercing scream.

The sound of it filled the entire illusory world, reaching its every corner. All of the pill furnaces inside heard it, and began to tremble. They immediately began to rush toward Meng Hao.

In the blink of an eye, Meng Hao was surrounded by stream after stream of glowing lights. A thousand, five thousand, ten thousand, fifty thousand, one hundred thousand....

More than one hundred thousand beams of light circulated around Meng Hao. The glow they caused rose up endlessly, and gradually transformed into one hundred thousand pill furnaces. They had Meng Hao completely surrounded. The buzzing noise they emitted echoed out as they spun around him at top speed. It seemed they had Meng Hao in their cross-hairs; if he didn't release the black pill furnace, they would attack him.

The black pill furnace youth, ceased its attempts to flee. A proud look appeared on its face, then aggressive arrogance. It looked at Meng Hao as if it were attempting to provoke him. However, it was at this moment that Meng Hao lifted his hand and once again slapped the face.

Rage covered the face of the black pill furnace youth. A scream rang out, causing the surrounding hundred thousand pill furnaces to suddenly charge in attack. They shot toward Meng Hao, sending out ripples throughout the air. Their glow lifted up to the heavens. Meng Hao merely gave a cold snort, and closed his eyes.

"Time to leave!"

His will sprang into action, immediately beginning to disappear, along with the furnace he gripped in his hands. Its shrill cry slowly dissipated as the hundred thousand pill furnaces charged in attack. Not a single one of them was even able to touch Meng Hao.

Outside of the pill furnace in the Celestial Land, Meng Hao sat cross-legged in meditation. Suddenly, his eyes flashed open. The instant they did, a black glow shot up in front of him, and a pill furnace appeared. Despite

the fact that it was here, it appeared to be struggling.

But Meng Hao's will was still in his body; how could he possibly allow it to flee? He gripped it hard, and his eyes glowed with a fierce cold aura.

"Are you really looking to die?!"

The pill furnace continued to struggle, and as it did, a strand of will entered Meng Hao's mind. It said... it would rather die than submit!

Meng Hao smiled, although it was a smile filled with coldness.

"Rather die than submit? No, I'm not going to destroy you. Starting today, I don't care if you want to or not, you're my pill furnace, no matter how much you resist!" He stood up and looked toward Violet East Mountain, and the only remaining path leading up it.

At the same time, outside of the Celestial Land, on Eastern Emergence Mountain, the onlookers didn't seem to be very impressed. However, the eight Violet Furnace Lords' faces all flickered.

"That's...."

"That black pill furnace contains its own will!"

"I saw that same furnace when I was in there all those years ago.... I wanted to take it, but failed. This Fang Mu seems to have created some kind of connection with it...."

"It's extremely rare to see that pill furnace within the illusory world. The will of a Cultivator is no match for it, and should be incapable of capturing it. After all these years, it has become the sovereign pill furnace of the illusory world...."

"Just what promises did Fang Mu make to the black pill furnace to get it to accept him...? From the expression on his face, it seems that maybe the two of them are having some conflicts!" As the Violet Furnace Lords discussed the scene, the other onlookers also began to notice Meng Hao and the pill furnace.

"That's strange, why does Fang Mu have a black pill furnace? Everyone else got white ones...."

As people expressed their surprise, Grandmaster Pill Demon's eyes began to glitter with a strange light.

"This kid... actually managed to bring it out...." An imperceptible smile touched the corners of his mouth.

Back in the world of the Celestial Land, the pill furnace beneath Violet East Mountain began to tremble. A roaring sound filled the air, along with a seven-colored glow. It seemed almost like... the hundred thousand pill furnaces within were in a frenzy, trying to break their way out from within.

Chapter 282: The First Region

This scene caused everyone on the outside world to stare with wide eyes.

Many of the East Pill Division alchemists had faces filled with disbelief. The furnace within the Celestial land was emitting shocking booms. The roaring was so intense that the massive furnace rocked back and forth.

Quite a distance away, Meng Hao suddenly looked back. No one in the outside world would know why the furnace was doing this, but he did. The hundred thousand pill furnaces inside were attempting to bash their way out to pursue him.

His eyes glittering, he shot away from the pill furnace, reaching the final path available to tread on Violet East Mountain. He was exhausted, but he still propelled himself forward with full power. In the space of a few breaths, he was on the path, climbing upward. The mountain path disappeared behind him.

The pill furnace's booming grew even more intense, and popping sounds rang out. Meng Hao wasn't worried. Not even looking back, he continued up the mountain path.

Everyone in the outside world could see the pill furnace rocking violently back and forth; it seemed as if it would explode into pieces at any moment.

"Crafty move, kid," said Pill Demon with an enigmatic smile. He reached his hand out toward the image of the Celestial Land, and extended a finger. When his finger descended, a roar filled the sky of the Celestial Land, where magically appeared the massive image of a finger. The finger seemed to fill the entire sky and cover the entire land, becoming a canopy covering the whole Celestial Land.

The finger was incredibly thick and coarse; the fingerprint was clearly visible on its surface. The appearance of this immense finger seemed to shake the Celestial Land like the will of the Heavens itself! The sub-Patriarchs from the outside Sects were also astonished.

They watched the screen mutely as the scene unfolded within the Celestial Land. The power it emitted shook the heaven and rocked the earth, as if it had governance over both. Endless, infinite ripples emanated out, as if the finger had a will of its own. It slowly pressed down on the furnace at the foot of Violet East Mountain.

The instant it pressed down, the entire world of the Celestial Land shook; after that, everything was still. The previously rocking and trembling pill furnace was now incapable of any movement whatsoever as the finger pressed down on it.

All of this lasted for the space of about two breaths. Then, the enormous finger disappeared, and the pill furnace was once again calm.

On Eastern Emergence Mountain, everything was quiet. Patriarch Violet Sieve was panting as his heart raced. He looked over in shock at the expressionless Grandmaster Pill Demon.

“According to the rumors,” he thought, “the most powerful expert in the Violet Fate Sect is not a Patriarch of the Violet Qi Division, but Grandmaster Pill Demon himself. The rumors also say that Grandmaster Pill Demon’s Cultivation Base reached the Spirit Severing stage years ago. If it hadn’t, how could he have lived more than a thousand years?”

The sub-Patriarchs from the other Sects all seemed to be thinking the same thing. The Second Dao Lord of the Solitary Sword Sect lowered his head slightly. He was one of the few people present who knew how frightening Grandmaster Pill Demon’s Cultivation base actually was.

Because Pill Demon didn’t want to make a big deal about it, he’d only invited these sub-Patriarchs to the apprentice-accepting ceremony. Otherwise, he would have invited the true Patriarchs of the great Sects and Clans.

Xu Luo from the Blood Demon Sect was panting slowly, and his eyes glowed with a blood-colored shine that quickly turned into reverence. He thought silently about how much the Blood Demon Sect feared Grandmaster Pill Demon. They had compiled many of the rumors regarding Grandmaster Pill Demon, and had uncovered a shocking secret.

Unfortunately, such a secret would never be known to very many people.

Zhou Jie of the Black Sieve Sect looked on with narrowed eyes. A cold will gleamed in his eyes, mixed with an unprecedented sense of concentration.

“Seems somewhat familiar, like the Qi of an old friend....” His eyes flickered as he looked at Pill Demon.

As the outsiders were shocked by Grandmaster Pill Demon’s actions, Meng Hao was walking up the steps of the path on Violet East Mountain. Occasionally he would look up ahead, but all he could see was mist. The peak of the mountain itself was not visible.

Time passed slowly. Meng Hao trudged up the steps, feeling more and more apprehension at how tall this mountain was. Five days had passed already. He had long since lost sight of the land below; clouds and fog completely surrounded him, obscuring his vision, making it impossible to see the world outside the mountain.

However... however high he was, Meng Hao got the feeling that when compared to the peak of the mountain, he was still at its base.

The higher he went, the thinner the air got. There was nothing that could put pressure onto his Cultivation base, but the further along he went, the more effort it took to take each step. Soon it took twice as much as it had when he started out.

Meng Hao had started out his journey along the path at a dead rush, and already exhausted at that. Add in the effort he spent struggling with the black pill furnace, and he could no longer race ahead. Now, he went one slow step at a time. Every once in a while he would pause and look around. The immediate surroundings were lush and verdant. Grass grew all around, which Meng Hao would occasionally pick.

From the perspective of the outside observers, Meng Hao had already fallen far behind. All the other candidates were much further ahead of him.

This was especially true of Ye Feimu, who was the first alchemist to

enter the first of the four regions. Just up ahead of him was an enormous stone boulder which was covered with dense inscriptions. After examining it for some time, Ye Feimu sat down next to it cross-legged. After that he pulled out a pill furnace and began to concoct a pill.

The next day, the pill emerged. Holding it carefully with both hands, he proceeded past the boulder.

Not long after, Chu Yuyan also concocted a pill, and then proceeded forward. All of the other alchemists except for Meng Hao did the same.

The master alchemists of the East Pill Division began to discuss what was happening.

“No wonder Ye Feimu is at the peak of the Furnace Lord rank. His Cultivation base is extraordinary, and he was the first person to step into the first region. His ability to recognize medicinal pills as well as his pill concocting skill are both anything but sloppy. I bet he’s going to win.”

“Chu Yuyan is also doing well. This promotion trial by fire is most likely going to come down to a decision between the two of them. Earlier, I thought Fang Mu might have had a chance, but I never thought he would spend so much time getting a pill furnace. What a pity.”

“Right. If your first step is slow, then all of them will be slow....”

Most of the sound of discussion came from the ordinary master alchemists. The Furnace Lords and Violet Furnace Lords just watched on thoughtfully, opting to say nothing.

A few days later, Meng Hao finally reached the first region, and saw the enormous boulder. He looked at the inscriptions, studying them for a while, before glancing at the path which proceeded on upward.

“This is the first region. After this boulder, the path to the second region is covered with a poisonous miasma.... One must concoct a poison repelling pill to be able to get through safely. The greatest difficulty is that throughout the journey, different miasmas will appear, and special pills will have to be concocted for each one.” Meng Hao thought about the situation for a moment. Finally, he pulled out the black pill furnace and

looked it over. It seemed to him that he hadn't truly won out over it, so he decided to put it back into his bag of holding, leaving it suppressed for the time being. Instead, he took out the Ten Thousand Refinements Furnace, put some medicinal plants in it, and then started concocting.

After two hours he had produced a medicinal pill. He swallowed it, then glanced around at the scenery once more, and then walked past the enormous rock. As he proceeded onward, his body was enveloped by a thin mist.

The master alchemists immediately started to discuss what had just happened.

"Furnace Lord Fang Mu thinks a bit too much of himself. He only used two hours to concoct the pill. Of all the other candidates, the one who used the least amount of time was Ye Feimu, who took four hours. The longest was a day.

"How could he possibly compare with Furnace Lord Ye? Furnace Lord Ye is Grandmaster Pill Cauldron. Look, he's the furthest ahead, and is already half way through the first region."

Everyone watching the screens could clearly see what was happening, and knew exactly how far everyone had progressed. Even some of the Furnace Lords exchanged glances; to them, it really did look like Meng Hao was being sloppy and careless.

Of course, Meng Hao had no idea what things they were saying, nor did he care to know. He continued on relentlessly through the miasma. It grew thicker as he went, and the color changed as well, to dark gray.

All the plants and flowers in the area were withered, and seemingly had been for years. A gloomy, cold aura filled the air. As Meng Hao went on, he occasionally caught sight of arm-length centipedes, scurrying about quickly through the shrivelled grass.

However, whatever poisonous bugs that appeared as Meng Hao walked along, would suddenly pause, seemingly incapable of doing anything to him. They would just let him continue on his way.

Time passed slowly. As he traveled he would occasionally take break, using some of the nearby withered grass, as well as some of the poisonous bugs, to concoct a medicinal pill. He did this a total of three times.

More and more poisonous bugs began to appear, soon, they were swarming. But as soon as Meng Hao neared, they would either begin to tremble, or run away. As for the roiling miasma, it would consistently move out of the way, making way for Meng Hao to travel along the path.

This too, was clearly visible to the observers, who watched on with wide-eyed astonishment. Soon, more and more eyes were focusing on Meng Hao's screen. It wasn't just the East Pill Division; even Cultivators from the other Sects were watching closely.

"He's using the poison bugs to make medicinal pills, but what pill exactly?"

"What medicinal pill is that? It has such an incredible effect...."

The Cultivators watched on in astonishment, then glanced over at the screens of the other candidates, including Ye Feimu and Chu Yuyan. It seemed most of them were reaching the end of the stairs that were part of the first region. Most of them had concocted medicinal pills on many occasions during the journey. They also would concoct pills to ward off the poison, but none of them were as dramatically effective as Meng Hao's.

This, of course, was because the poison bugs along the path didn't seem to have any inclination of avoiding Ye Feimu and the others. However, in their terror, they clambered over each other in order to get out of Meng Hao's way.

If this scene was taking place anywhere except the Violet Fate Sect trial by fire, then plenty of people would begin to make connections. But this was a Violet Furnace Lord promotion, so there ended up being only one conclusion drawn by the observers.

The pills Fang Mu concocted were anything but ordinary!

Chapter 283: Goofing Off

Actually, even if Meng Hao hadn't concocted the various medicinal pills, the miasma wouldn't have been the least bit harmful to him in any way. The Resurrection Lily had been suppressed, but its nature talent was still within him, which could innately dispel all varieties of poisons.

Meng Hao did not fear poison.

Granted, many years had passed since the Blood Immortal Legacy tournament, which so many Cultivators had witnessed ¹. However, anyone observing could easily make a connection between the two. Thus, he had concocted the medicinal pills to make it seem like they were repelling the poisons. However, their true function was to suppress his own Qi, which was affecting the poison bugs and the miasma.

That of course was something about him that was completely different from the other candidates.

There was really no choice but to suppress his Qi in this way. If he didn't do so with the medicinal pills, then as he traveled through the miasma, it would explode away from him immediately, and the entire area would be completely free of it, without the slightest trace.

Even having suppressed his Qi, the miasma still spread out away from him. There was literally nothing he could do to make himself walk through the miasma and have it remain still.

As for the poisonous bugs, were it not for the fact that his Qi had been suppressed, they simply wouldn't dare to exist nearby. In fact, Meng Hao was worried that he might lose control of his suppressed Qi, and that any bugs which hadn't fled far enough away from him would spontaneously die. If that happened, it would definitely attract attention from the outside world.

Therefore, the best he could do was use medicinal pills to suppress his Qi, be extremely cautious not to allow the miasma to completely disperse, and try to make the poison bugs behave a bit more normally. Despite all of that, he caused quite a stir on the outside world.

However, it was just a stir, not enough to draw any connections to the Blood Immortal Legacy tournament.

Several days later, the first person made it to the second region, and of course, it was Ye Feimu. Behind him was Chu Yuyan, and then in third place, Meng Hao, the newcomer to the top of the group.

As far as the other seven people, two more eventually appeared at the boulder marking the second region. The other five were still stuck back on the path in the miasma, concocting pills and slowly moving forward.

When the candidates arrived at the large boulder, all of them discovered the same thing. Strands of violet Qi emerged and latched onto their pill furnaces and then merged into them, causing them to change color.

The same thing happened to the Meng Hao. The black pill furnace seemed very opposed to this happening, but considering how it was suppressed by Meng Hao, there was nothing it could do to resist.

People outside immediately began to discuss what was happening.

“The’ve only just passed the first region, and you can already see the difference....”

“It looks like the final candidate will be one of these five people. However, I still think Furnace Lord Ye has the advantage.”

Suddenly, Violet Furnace Lord An Zaihai’s voice rang out. “The Violet Furnace Lord trial by fire promotion is a test of an alchemist’s skill in the Dao of Alchemy. Falling behind doesn’t mean anything. The year I took the test, I came in last in the first two regions. However, I successfully passed the third region, the one in which most people get stuck. You might better spend your time observing how these ten Chosen alchemists concoct pills, than discussing things the way you see them now.” An Zaihai’s echoing voice immediately silenced the discussions of the surrounding alchemists. They grew silent and thoughtfully began to watch what was happening.

What they saw was that the five alchemists in last place were all very calm. All of them were concocting pills in different ways, and not one of

them experienced the slightest failure.

Time passed slowly. Meng Hao had already been staring thoughtfully for several hours at the boulder leading into the second region. It wasn't just him. On their various respective paths, Ye Feimu and Chu Yuyan were also staring with furrowed brows at the boulders.

The boulders completely blocked the various paths. Only by fulfilling the requirements laid out, would a fissure open in the boulder and allow passage through.

Meng Hao murmured to himself as he sat cross-legged next to the boulder. "Concoct medicinal pills for the four great stages of Qi Condensation, Foundation Establishment, Core Formation and Nascent Soul. Each one must have medical strength of eighty percent or higher, and must contain variations from among the ten million variations of plants and vegetation. If you can create your own unique medicinal pill, this will be counted as perfection...." A thoughtful look appeared in his eyes.

The four regions of the Violet Furnace Lord trial by fire contained practical tests of an alchemist's skill in the Dao of alchemy. The first region tested the skill of concocting pills based on the current circumstances. Different situations required different pills to be concocted, requiring flexibility. It seemed simple, but in reality, most Furnace Lords were incapable of doing such a thing.

The second region was even more difficult. It tested fundamental pill concocting ability. Four medicinal pills, one for each of the four great stages. Medicinal strength must be maintained, and mastery of the ten million variations of plants and vegetation was a necessity.

This trial by fire was comprehensive, and as for this second region, someone not at the peak of the Furnace Lord rank would be incapable of passing it. Even for someone with those qualifications, passing was not an easy thing.

Meng Hao sat there thinking silently for some time, as did Chu Yuyan, Ye Feimu, along with the other candidates who made it to the second

region boulder.

There were no requirements regarding the medicinal plants which could be used; each alchemist could do however he pleased. In fact, based on one's mastery of the variations of plants and vegetations, one could simply make a depiction of a medicinal plant on the surface of the boulder, and the power of the Celestial Land would produce an illusory replication, which could be used for illusory pill concoction.

They were only illusory replications, but were actually very realistic.

"There are two options," thought Chu Yuyan. "One is the easy path, to concoct an existing pill. After all, the only requirements are those regarding medical strength and skill with the ten million variations of plants and vegetation.

"The other path, is much harder, and that is to create a new medicinal pill, to make something out of nothing.... Both of these two paths can lead onward, toward the highest pinnacle. However, it is clear that, the road of a Violet Furnace Lord... lies along the second path!" Determination filled her eyes. She was an apprentice of Grandmaster Pill Demon, so in order to become a Violet Furnace Lord, she had to prove herself.

Ye Feimu obviously felt the same way. He stared at the boulder, and as he did, a bright light shone in his eyes, along with a proud, unyielding look.

"If I'm going to concoct something," he thought, "I will concoct a pill no other person has ever seen, a pill which contains my very self! I will show that I have the will of a Violet Furnace Lord!"

At almost the same time, resolve showed on the faces of Chu Yuyan and Ye Feimu as they chose the second of the two paths.

As for the others, most picked the easy path, although some attempted to concoct original creations. Each one made their decision based on their own Dao of alchemy.

Meng Hao looked at the boulder thoughtfully, sighing as he rubbed the bridge of his nose. He had recently traveled for four days nonstop, had

engaged in a battle of will with the black pill furnace, and was now completely exhausted. He looked at the requirements listed on the boulder, and realized that traversing the path of medicinal pill creation would definitely make him more tired.

He began to murmur to himself: “Concocting an existing pill is definitely better than coming up with something new. Creating a new medicinal pill requires luck, alchemic enlightenment, and meticulous concentration, otherwise the quality will be inferior.... Yeah, this is the best decision. My analysis is definitely correct. I will not let my quality drop.” The more he thought about it, the more it made sense to him. His mind at ease, he began to concoct medicinal pills. He lifted his right hand and pressed down onto the boulder; immediately it rippled like water. The medicinal plants which floated in his mind, slowly began to appear in front of him.

“A medicinal pill for the Qi Condensation stage. I’ll make the simplest one, a Qi Condensation Pill.” He flicked his sleeve, and an illusory pill furnace emerged from the boulder, into which he fed bunch after bunch of medicinal plants. After another moment’s thought, he began to concoct.

Not too much time passed before Chu Yuyan’s eyes opened and she waved her beautiful hand. A pill furnace appeared and her eyes glittered brightly as she began to concoct.

After enough time passed for an incense stick to burn, Ye Feimu opened his eyes. Filled with self confidence, he began to concoct.

The observers outside on Eastern Emergence Mountain were watching intently as everything happened; their eyes passed back and forth among the ten screens, including Meng Hao, the tenth person.

Of course, the focus was Ye Feimu and Chu Yuyan, who had performed spectacularly in the first region. And of course many were paying attention to Meng Hao, who had attracted such attention with his own performance there.

However, Meng Hao was taking the easy path to pill cultivation. Currently, he was concocting a Qi Condensation Pill; he wasn’t the only one, in total, seven were doing so.

The audience could see the instructions on the boulder, and thus began discussing things in low tones. It was relatively easy to determine what this part of the test was about.

“It turns out Fang Mu is concocting a Qi Condensation Pill.... It seems like he’s falling further and further behind Chu Yuyan and Ye Feimu in this second region.”

“I heard about Furnace Lord Ye Feimu a long time ago. His skill in the Dao of alchemy is at the pinnacle. Based on the look of it, he’s not just concocting some ordinarily medicinal pill. Could he be working on an original creation?”

Lin Hailong gave a slight smile as he turned to An Zaihai and said, “Chu Yuyan is most likely also creating an original medicinal pill.... Simply having the confidence to do that is worthy of praise.”

An Zaihai gave a slight nod. His expression was calm as he glanced at the ten screens. When he saw Meng Hao, and took note of what he was concocting, he felt slightly amused. In his opinion, Meng Hao understood that an original creation would allow him to pass this critical juncture, but had decided instead to save time and effort.

Time passed, and in the blink of an eye, three days had gone by. Meng Hao had produced a Qi Condensation pill of eighty percent medicinal strength, as well as a Foundation Establishment Day of similar quality. Now he was working on a pill for the Core Formation stage, a Spiritualization Pill.

Before, Meng Hao would have had a difficult time concocting such a pill, considering his Cultivation base. However, now that he had ten Dao Pillars, and was of the great circle of Foundation Establishment, concocting a simple, common Spiritualization Pill required a bit of effort, but wasn’t very difficult.

In fact, he was both concocting and resting at the same time. Having been in Violet East Mountain for several days now, he had now recovered quite a bit of energy. He was no longer exhausted, and his pill concocting went a bit faster than before.

However, the moment his Spiritualization Pill emerged was also the exact moment when Chu Yuyan's original Qi Condensation stage medicinal pill came out. When it did, brilliant light swirled up from her pill; at a single glance, it was obvious this was no ordinary pill. It immediately attracted quite a bit of notice on the outside world.

At the same time, Ye Feimu's original medicinal pill emerged. A four-colored glow enveloped it, a bit brighter than the glow from Chu Yuyan's pill. A sudden gasp of astonishment could be heard from the spectators.

As for Meng Hao, however, he produced nothing extraordinary whatsoever. Like most of the others, he had chosen to concoct familiar pills. Furthermore, from his attitude, it seemed as if he were goofing off. It was completely different from the conscientiousness of Chu Yuyan and Ye Feimu.

In fact the clear cut difference between them... made Meng Hao seem even more unremarkable.

Only one person on Eastern Emergence Mountain was different. Grandmaster Pill Demon. When he casually glanced at the screen depicting Meng Hao, an imperceptible shadow of a smile appeared on his face.

*

1. The Blood Immortal Legacy tournament was quite a long story arc. He passed the "poison" matrix in chapter 125.

Chapter 284: Three People; Three Daos of Alchemy

By the time Chu Yuyan and Ye Feimu were in the midst of creating their Foundation Establishment stage medicinal pill, Meng Hao had already finished with the Spiritualization Pill, and had begun to work on the Nascent Soul medicinal pill.

Medicinal Pills for increasing the Cultivation Base during the Nascent Soul stage were made from rare medicinal plants not often seen in the world. There were not many such pills in the Southern Domain; for four or even five people from a single Sect to possess one would be considered beyond incredible.

These were not pills that could be mass produced; one batch might make three, or perhaps five. Therefore, they were quite prized. Such pills were not common even in the Violet Fate Sect.

When you consider that a Nascent Soul Cultivator who practices breathing exercises can absorb all of the spiritual energy of Heaven and Earth within a three kilometer radius in a single breath, it is easy to imagine how important medicinal pills can be to them. If they possess such pills, all is well. If they don't, the only remaining option is to take them by force.

However, when it comes to medicinal pills for Nascent Soul Cultivators, the most difficult type to concoct, as well as the most valuable, are pills which extend longevity!

The value of such pills is extremely high; a lifespan that does not exceed on thousand years, is not a defiance of the Heavens. The only way to live past one thousand years, to defy the Heavens, is to sever the Spirit. Otherwise, one can only waste away in death.

Of all the medicinal pills for the Nascent Soul stage, the most basic are healing pills, and such pills are also the easiest to concoct.

Generally, they are of average effectiveness; however, no matter which

way you look at them, such pills must be considered of the Nascent Soul stage. Meng Hao decided to concoct just such a simple medicinal pill for the Nascent Soul stage. As far as he was concerned, this wasn't considered finagling, but rather, using the most simple method to pass this part of the test. He didn't want to expend a lot of mental energy to concoct a unique, one-of-a-kind pill.

Therefore, several days later, one of the most common healing pills for the Nascent Soul stage emerged. Meng Hao held the pills from the four stages in hand, and then, pushed them into the boulder. The boulder began to tremble, and then a fissure appeared that snaked down the very middle of the boulder, a little over half a foot wide.

It almost seemed like the boulder wasn't pleased with Meng Hao's medicinal pills. However, he had met the requirements; each pill contained five of the ten million medicinal plant variations, although most of them had been obscured by Meng Hao using a technique just for that purpose.

He looked at the fissure and then cleared his throat. He knew that he was being observed by others; with a bit of a bashful and embarrassed expression, he lowered his head and walked up to the crack. By turning his body to the side, and exerting a bit of effort, he was just able to squeeze himself through. Then, with a solemn and dignified expression, and not the least bit of awkwardness, he continued along the steps up the mountain, toward the third region.

When the spectators in the outside world saw this, the master alchemists of the East Pill Division could be seen making bitter smiles. Those who were relatively familiar with Fang Mu seemed a bit embarrassed. Using such a method to pass this part of the test really was a bit of an eyesore.

This was especially after looking back at the earnestness with which Chu Yuyan and Ye Feimu persisted in their work. Meng Hao's attitude immediately aroused the scorn of those who hadn't liked him very much to begin with. A few of the eight Violet Furnace Lords also frowned.

However, regardless of anything, Meng Hao was the first one to make it past the second region. Hands clasped behind his back, he casually walked into the third region, looking exactly as if he were just going for a stroll and taking in the scenery.

One of the Violet Furnace Lords, a middle-aged man named Ye Yuntian, said, "Fang Mu doesn't seem to be taking things very seriously. With such sub-par character, he's clearly not suitable to become a Violet Furnace Lord." His voice was cool and seemed to carry the weight of authority.

An Zaihai laughed and said, "Not necessarily. There's no rule against using the simplest method to charge past."

"That's true, Elder Brother An," replied Ye Yuntian with a smile. "Now, though, I'm very curious to see what sort of decision he will make in the third region."

Moments later, more candidates emerged from the second region. Only Chu Yuyan and Ye Feimu remained. A total of five people came out. The other two were unable to complete medicinal pills with eighty percent medicinal strength, and thus declared forfeiture.

Now, only eight screens remained of the original ten above the pill furnace in the outside world.

When Meng Hao reached the boulder marking the third region, violet Qi poured out. It was only a tiny thread, and lasted only for the space of about three breaths. He had succeeded, but the approval of the Celestial Land was not great.

After the strand of violet Qi entered the pill furnace, Meng Hao looked at the boulder, then sat down cross-legged in front of it. He took a moment to erase the last bit of exhaustion in him, until he was filled with energy.

Chu Yuyan's final pill emerged, and when it did, her face was pale. It had been extremely difficult for her to concoct the fourth pill. As for original creations, she had persisted up until the Foundation Establishment pill; as for the Core Formation and Nascent Soul pills, she was unable to create new versions of such pills. Instead, she had selected the most difficult of the pill formulas she knew to concoct the final two pills.

Wiping the sweat from her brow, she watched as a three meter wide fissure split apart the boulder in front of her. A self-confident smile on her face, she strode forward.

After her, Ye Feimu finished his pill concoction. Similar to Chu Yuyan, he had been unable to make original creations for all four pill varieties. He had succeeded in making an original pill for the Core Formation stage, but as for the Nascent Soul stage, he could not proceed. Having no other choice, he created the most high-level and difficult pill for the Nascent Soul stage that he could think of. It took ten attempts before he finally succeeded.

Everything happened relatively quickly, because everything moved more quickly within the world of the Celestial Land. Were it outside, it would take over a year to concoct the four pills he had.

Ye Feimu took in a deep breath as he watched a six meter wide fissure cracked open the boulder in front of him. A proud look filled his eyes as he strode through.

It was becoming readily apparent to the observers which of the various candidates were above the others. A buzz of discussion echoed out as they began to talk about the shocking sight of the fissure created by Ye Feimu.

As Chu Yuyan and the others reached the boulder marking the third region, dense violet Qi poured out toward them. The violet Qi which emerged for Chu Yuyan lasted for the time it takes an incense stick to burn before dissipating. Most shockingly was Ye Feimu. His lasted for the time it takes two incense sticks to burn; furthermore, his pill furnace had already turned light violet!

On their various respective paths, the other candidates' pill furnaces absorbed the Violet Qi. Afterward, they began to concentrate on the boulder. Frowns appeared; the test for the third region was even more difficult than the first two.

Meng Hao finished his meditation. He opened his eyes, and they glowed brightly. He was completely recovered, and his eyes glittered as he examined the text on the boulder in front of him. A thoughtful expression

appeared on his face.

Beyond the boulder, there were no stone steps. The path of steps seemed to end right here, and only clouds were visible.

“Nine Treasures Pearl Curtain Plants....” Meng Hao’s eyes narrowed as he looked at the carving on the boulder. It depicted a type of medicinal plant with nine flowers on it, each of which was a different color. “Three Treasures Pearl Curtains Plants are common. Six Treasures Pearl Curtain Plants are uncommon. As for Nine Treasures Pearl Curtain Plants... they are rarely ever seen! Each flower contains different medicinal properties. The nine petals all work in harmony with each other. This single medicinal plant can be used in over a thousand different pill formulas.... The formulas used and the quality of the medicinal pills concocted will determine how many steps appear....” Meng Hao closed his eyes for a moment to think.

On the other paths, the other candidates were facing the exact same test.

Chu Yuyan reached up to place her right hand onto the boulder. Immediately, a flickering, glowing light appeared, and the Nine Treasures Pearl Curtain Plant materialized in front of her.

The Cultivators on the mountain peak in the outside world, including the representatives from the other Sects and Clans, were all paying very close attention to the incredible scene which was taking place within the trial by fire.

Violet Furnace Lord Ye Yuntian coolly opened his mouth and said, “The third region tests both pill concocting and decision making. How many pills must be concocted to magically create a perfect set of stairs? That is the key.” From start to finish, his gaze never left Ye Feimu’s screen.

His words caused the faces of many of the master alchemists to fill with astonishment. One by one, they began to focus intently on the various screens.

Chu Yuyan looked at the plant floating in front of her. A thoughtful look glittered in her phoenix-like eyes.

“The Dao of alchemy is like the great Dao of cultivation,” she thought. “Plants and vegetation grow within Heaven and Earth. However, Heaven and Earth are not alive. Concocting pills... is like refining the Heavens and transforming the Earth, finding a spark of life therein, and turning it into a medicinal pill. Therefore, pill concoction... is a search for life, a way to find that spark which doesn’t exist within Heaven and Earth!

“Nine is the ultimate number; therefore, I will make nine pills, and each pill will contain eight flowers. Furthermore, each pill will contain the medicinal properties of the one missing flower! These nine pills will form a cycle that will open up the path to the Heavens!” Chu Yuyan’s eyes glowed with determination now that she had made her decision. She immediately set to work concocting.

After thinking for several hours, a serious look filled Ye Feimu’s face, and he took a deep breath. His eyes narrowed as he flicked his sleeve; a Nine Treasures Pearl Curtain Plant appeared in front of him, and he began to concoct.

“If I’m going to concoct a pill, I’ll only make one,” he thought. “It will contain the medicinal properties of all nine flowers, as well as that of an additional medicinal pill! I will concoct not the number nine, but the number ten! I will concoct a pill that contains a medicinal property that the Nine Treasures Pearl Curtain Plant does not. In keeping with my identity, this tenth medicinal property will be unprecedented!”

It was difficult to say whose thinking in regard to the Dao of alchemy was more advanced. Between the two of them, one used the Dao of alchemy to refine life to the pinnacle. The other combined all the complex variations to create something unique.

At this moment, their skill in the Dao of alchemy was clearly visible to the spectators on the mountain top, and caused quite a stir. Everyone, including the representatives from the outside Sects, began to think deeply about the proceedings.

After Chu Yuyan and Ye Feimu made their decisions, the eight Violet Furnace Lords nodded in praise.

Grandmaster Pill Demon's face, however, was unreadable, making everyone wonder which screen he was watching....

It was at this moment that Meng Hao opened his eyes, and they gleamed with a strange light. He lifted up his hand and pushed it onto the boulder. The Nine Treasures Pearl Curtain Plant appeared, along with his pill furnace. He did not immediately begin to concoct, though, but rather stare at the medicinal plant, his eyes shining.

Within his mind flitted countless pill formulas. His skill with plants and vegetation was in full force as well. The Nine Treasures Pearl Curtain Plant rotated in his mind as he mentally began to organize the various medicinal properties and how they worked together.

However, Meng Hao quickly decided to clear his mind. He looked at the medicinal plant, and then his eyes began to gleam even more brightly. He looked... interested. His bearing now was vastly different than the laziness he had displayed in the second region.

"I'm going to concoct ten pills," he thought. "Nine minor pills, and one master pill. Nine is the ultimate number, representing strength. My body is the pill furnace, and my heart is the pill formula. Refine the Heavens, refine the Earth, refine the changes of Time. Concoct a pill that... contains the essence of nature's simplicity!" A look both deep and bright shone in his eyes. Were this any other place, he would not display such an attitude toward pill concocting. But within this Violet Fate Sect trial by fire, his interest had been piqued. He would no longer conceal his true self; he would fully display his skill in the Dao of alchemy.

Chapter 285: Who is the Strongest?

Meng Hao took a deep breath. Then, he lifted up his right hand, took hold of a flower, and put it into the pill furnace.

Only the Violet Furnace Lords on the mountaintop could get an idea from Meng Hao's actions what he intended to do. However, all of them had different expressions on their faces. Some were frowning, others seemed lost in thought.

"Fang Mu's choice is... interesting.... However, he won't be able to pull off something like that!"

"Even still, that type of thinking in the Dao of alchemy is laudable. It contains some of the frivolity of youth, but considering his skill in the Dao of alchemy, he definitely won't be able to succeed. I still favor Ye Feimu. That kid's Dao of alchemy contains persistence. Persistence is a necessity for all of us alchemists."

The Violet Furnace Lords continued to discuss matters as they watched on.

Only An Zaihai gaped for a moment, before a bright gleam filled his eyes. "He wants to concoct...." An Zaihai's breathing grew heavier. He did not agree with the others. Without thinking about it, he turned to look at his Master, Pill Demon. Grandmaster Pill Demon sat there cross-legged. A strange light flickered in his eyes, then disappeared.

Time passed, three days. Chu Yuyan had completed her first medicinal pill. When it appeared, 1,111 steps appeared up ahead of her.

For over one thousand steps to appear caused a buzz to rise up among the crowd on the mountain top.

Moments later, Ye Feimu also produced a pill. As soon as it appeared, so did the stones stairs, 2,000 of them. This caused the observing alchemists on the mountaintop to immediately rise to their feet, looks of astonishment on their faces.

What caused even more of a stir was that Ye Feimu looked at the pill

with a frown, and then crushed it between his fingers. Immediately, the 2,000 stairs vanished.

It seemed that 2,000 steps... didn't satisfy him!

In addition to Chu Yuyan, Ye Feimu, and Meng Hao, two others were concocting pills. All had made different choices in their concoctions, and all paled in comparison to Chu Yuyan and Ye Feimu. Each of them concocted three pills respectively, which produced a total of seven hundred stairs each.

They did not dare to crush their medicinal pills, though. No matter how many pills it took, they would cause all of the stairs to appear.

As for the alchemists who had fallen behind, they slowly showed up. After experiencing the difficulty of the second test, they sat there thoughtfully for a bit before beginning to concoct pills.

Of course, none of them produced results as spectacular as Chu Yuyan or Ye Feimu. They took the easy route; this was not in error, however, it did not count as being part of their personal Dao of alchemy.

Enough time passed for an incense stick to burn. Meng Hao was now finished with the first minor pill!

It emerged, a bluish-green medicinal pill, which Meng Hao had concocted using the bluish-green flower from among the nine.

The pill furnace was illusory; the Nine Treasures Pearl Curtain Plant was also illusory. Therefore, the pill that was produced was obviously not real. Despite that, it could be held in hand, and it could be crushed.

This was one of the bizarre, miraculous aspects of the Celestial Land, a magic that could create something from nothing!

Meng Hao looked at the bluish-green medicinal pill in his hand, then lifted his head. Further up, the mountain path began to buzz. Suddenly, out of thin-air appeared... a step.

A single step!

Meng Hao's face was the same as ever, without the slightest hint of

change. Much earlier, he had predicted that this would happen. He looked back down at the Nine Treasures Pearl Curtain Plant's crimson flower, grabbed it, and began to concoct.

Seeing this caused a buzz to immediately rise up among the audience on the mountaintop. Of course, the Violet Furnace Lords didn't participate, nor did the Patriarch-level Cultivators from the outside Sects. They only looked on in silent thought. Based on their concentration, their age, and their experiences in life, eccentrics like this wouldn't easily show what they were thinking.

However, the disciples who had accompanied them had not reached such a level. Seeing what happened instantly caused astonished exclamations and discussions to fill the air.

"Alchemist Fang Mu only created a single stair...! That's simply too few! Is he really a Furnace Lord?"

"At the very least, the other candidates created a few hundred stairs. Furnace Lord Ye created the most, 2,000, and wasn't even satisfied with that. But Fang Mu... he doesn't look even the least bit embarrassed!"

"Maybe he has some special plan...."

Such discussions couldn't be avoided. Meng Hao's medicinal pill, and the one stair it had produced, was immediately divisive. Everyone could clearly see what had happened, and it was only natural that people immediately began to make comparisons.

Han Bei frowned. She couldn't believe that Fang Mu's skill in the Dao of alchemy was so limited. After her interactions with him in the Black Sieve Sect, she knew of his extreme cunning, and was convinced that he must be pulling off some clever trick.

Zhou Jie's expression was normal, without the slightest reaction whatsoever. It seemed as if nothing would cause him any surprise whatsoever.

Fatty was secretly clenching his fists. He knew that Fang Mu was Meng Hao, which caused him extreme anxiety inside, especially considering that

he could not possibly charge forward and warn Meng Hao about what was happening.

Li Shiqi's eyes glittered slightly as she watched Fang Mu on the screen. She then glanced at Ye Feimu, and frowned, as if she wasn't quite sure the meaning of everything that was happening.

Of course, Meng Hao couldn't hear any of the commotion which he had caused on the outside, nor would he pay it any heed if he could. He was thoroughly engrossed in concocting his second medicinal pill. Again, his bearing was completely different from before in the second region.

However, the more earnestly he worked, the more derision rose up from the outsiders.

A day later, Chu Yuyan finished her second medicinal pill. Just the same as before, 1,111 stairs appeared. Ye Feimu's second pill also was completed. When it appeared, a great roaring shook the Heavens and rocked the Earth.

"4,000 stairs!! He's... he's no Furnace Lord! This Violet Furnace Lord Promotion definitely belongs to him!"

Violet Furnace Lord Ye Yuntian chuckled. He looked at Ye Feimu with an expression of deep praise. The other Violet Furnace Lords also looked at him with similar approval. They nodded, slight smiles on their faces.

Their praise grew even more obvious when they saw Ye Feimu once again crush the medicinal pill. The 4,000 stairs disappeared.

"Striving for perfection is Ye Feimu's weakness, and also his strength," said Ye Yuntian, smiling. "This kid's determination is something you rarely see in others. I hope that after becoming a Violet Furnace Lord, he will retain his tenacity, and use it to tread into realms we have not."

As they discussed the matter, An Zaihai sat there silently. He wasn't looking at any of the other candidates, only Meng Hao. Slowly, the shock in his eyes grew more intense.

Fatty gave an inward sigh as he looked at the screen with Meng Hao on it. "There's no way to compare. Ah, Meng Hao, why did you have to

encounter somebody so inhuman? How can you possibly compare to this Ye guy...?"

As the discussions proceeded, the other alchemists on Violet East Mountain continued to produce medicinal pills, Meng Hao included. When Meng Hao's pill was completed, a roaring sound filled the air, and a second stair appeared. This immediately caused muffled laughter to rise up from the Cultivators on the outside world. They seemed to find the appearance of a single stone step to be quite amusing.

Meng Hao's expression was the same as ever as he began to concoct his third minor pill.

Time passed by slowly. Meng Hao was by far in last place. In this third region, Chu Yuyan held her spot in first place. She had concocted eight medicinal pills, and was currently working on her ninth.

Up ahead of her on the mountain were 8,888 stone steps. It was an astonishing sight, and was already being given great recognition by the observers in the outside world. She was now being viewed as a possible contender with Ye Feimu.

This was especially the opinion among many alchemists of the East Pill Division. Quite a few greatly admired Chu Yuyan, and as they watched, their eyes burned with passion and hope as they wished her luck.

Besides Ye Feimu and Meng Hao, among the other candidates was an old man who had concocted thirty pills to produce a total of more than 8,300 stairs. Before, he hadn't attracted much attention, but now, of course, people were talking about him.

He had produced a lot of medicinal pills, however, all of them stemmed from his own Dao of alchemy.

As for the others, anywhere from 5,000 to more than 7,000 stairs had appeared. Meng Hao only had... 8 steps....

A single stone step had appeared each time he concocted one of the eight minor pills. However, Meng Hao was not in last place; rather, Ye Feimu was.

Of course, nobody actually believed him to be in last place. He was currently concocting a pill for the ninth time. The previous pill, the eighth one, had immediately produced 9,300 stairs. That, of course, had caused a commotion in the outside world. Surprise had even been visible in the eyes of some of the Patriarchs from the outside Sects.

Slowly, everyone on the mountaintop grew quiet, settling their Qi and calming their minds. They looked at the paths on the eight screens in front of them; they could clearly see that the moment of truth had arrived in the third region test. Any moment now, people would begin to pass onto the next region.

After enough time passed for two incense sticks to burn, Chu Yuyan's medicinal pill emerged. This was her ninth pill; immediately a black-colored cloud appeared above her pill furnace, the size of a hand. Electricity crackled, circling around above the pill furnace. The pill furnace emitted a roaring sound, and the ninth pill flew out; the path up ahead of Chu Yuyan immediately extended.

It grew from 8,888 stone stairs all the way to 9,999!

The absolute limit of stairs was 10,000. Chu Yuyan had created an incredible number of stairs. Reaching such an achievement in the Violet Furnace Lord trial by fire proved that she was an outstanding talent, worthy of being a Violet Furnace Lord.

Immediately, conversations broke out in the world outside.

"A Tribulation cloud appeared! That only happens for the most difficult to concoct medicinal pills.... Chu Yuyan is definitely worthy to be Grandmaster Pill Demon's apprentice! This is clear proof that she is qualified to be a Violet Furnace Lord!"

"9,999 stairs! Chu Yuyan's skill in the Dao of alchemy is shocking."

All eyes were on her, including master alchemists, Furnace Lords, Violet Furnace Lords, Sect Patriarchs!

Interlude: (beware of quasi, micro-“spoilers” of Xian Ni and Beseech the Devil!)

Amidst the boundless stars exists a vast, almost endless continent that seemed to be the very edge of the universe. It was apparently the last stop before the end of everything.

An infinite amount of spirits existed in this place, in the eastern region of which was a lake. Next to the lake was a house with a courtyard. Sitting next to the lake was middle-aged man, currently fishing. He had a mark on his forehead that appeared as if it might be a third eye. He looked handsome and intelligent, and his entire person emanated a strange, heretical Qi.

He sat there, seemingly fused with the world itself, as if when he opened his eyes, it was day, and when he closed them, it was night.

This was Su Ming, also known as Old Devil Su.

After some time passed, he lifted his head and looked up into the sky. A figure was approaching, that reached him almost immediately.

“Pockmarked Wang,” said Su Ming slowly, his eyes shining brightly. “I’ve been waiting for you for a long time.”

“Old Devil Su, I’ve been here for quite some time.” He was a middle-aged man with a full head of white hair. His features were beyond ordinary, and he possessed an indescribable aura. His smile and his voice made him seem as if he were the Lord of everything. He seemed to have lived a life of killing, a life of defiance of the Heavens. His name was Wang Lin, also known as Pockmarked Wang.

“I heard that Er Gen was violated again,” Su Ming said.

Wang Lin laughed. “He violated so many other people in the past... this is simply the cycle of Karma. I’ve been separated from him by countless stars, for three years. I haven’t really been paying much attention to him.”

A ponderous look filled his eyes as he stared out over the lake water, apparently recalling old memories.

“This time, he was violated by a large group of people,” said Su Ming slowly.

“Then violate them back!” said Wang Lin calmly with the flick of a sleeve.

“I am Wang Lin from Xian Ni!”

“I am Su Ming from Beseech the Devil!”

“For the sake of the five years of these stories, the both of us beg all Fellow Daoists to give monthly vote tickets to Er Gen and ‘Spirit Stones’ to Deathblade!”

*

For those of you who upvoted my comment on reddit a while back, this is the interlude I previously didn't translate. As usual, this is all Er Gen's except for the tweak to the final line. By the way, what I'm translating as “violate” literally is “pop the chrysanthemum” which is a euphemism for ... ahem. Yeah, you get it. I couldn't find any information to indicate what the heck is going on in this passage, although some speculation is that it might have to do with certain characteristics of the copper mirror... Your guess is as good as mine, if anyone has more info please let me know....

P.S. Spirit Stones = dollars. Haha!

Chapter 286: The Most Powerful!

Chu Yuyan took a deep breath as she strode forward, walking directly up the stairs she herself had created.

Everyone else was still in the middle of concocting; the old man who had previously been in second place had now created more than 9,000 steps. Barring any unforeseen circumstances, he would be the second to pass through the third region.

However, it was just then that....

A shocking thunderclap sounded out, booming out from within the world of the Celestial Land. Concurrent with the sound of the thunderclap, a Tribulation cloud nearly three hundred meters in diameter appeared above Ye Feimu's pill furnace. The Tribulation cloud roiled as it appeared in mid-air, and thunderclaps echoed out in roars. It seemed it desired to destroy the medicinal pill which had just been concocted.

The thunder existed only within the world of the Celestial Land. Outside on Eastern Emergence Mountain, where the audience was, the weather was sunny with a gentle breeze. Everyone was closely watching Ye Feimu's screen and the Tribulation clouds within the Celestial Land.

Intense praise filling his eyes, Violet Furnace Lord Ye Yuntian lightly said, "Tribulation clouds. It seems the pill Feimu concocted has provoked Pill Tribulation."

Just as the Tribulation cloud was about to explode downward, Pill Demon lifted his hand and waved toward the screen. Immediately, the Tribulation cloud of Ye Feimu quivered and then began to disperse. The lightning within completely dissipated.

At the same moment, Ye Feimu's pill furnace exploded with a loud sound as a medicinal pill emerged. It was a nine-colored pill, containing all the nine colors of the Nine Treasures Pearl Curtain plant flowers. However, it also used their medicinal properties to produce a tenth medicinal property!

As soon as the pill appeared, the stairs in front of Ye Feimu boomed. Step after step appeared; ten, one hundred, one thousand... all the way to ten thousand steps!

Chu Yuyan would have had to produce more steps to make her stairs absolutely complete.

In the blink of an eye, Ye Feimu had risen from last place, to first!

He flicked his sleeve, and the pill furnace disappeared. As he proceeded up the stairs, he immediately became the focus of all attention.

“Such a Chosen of the Dao of alchemy... ten thousand stairs!”

“Who else could possibly be the Violet Furnace Lord other than him....”

“It seems that he really and truly is... Grandmaster Pill Cauldron!”

It just so happened that at this exact moment, Meng Hao's ninth minor pill emerged, adding one more stair to his path. Now there were nine. When compared with ten thousand, nine stone steps were almost too insignificant to mention.

Meng Hao's expression was the same as ever. He had no idea what was happening on the outside; he had no clue regarding the commotion caused by Chu Yuyan and Ye Feimu. His expression was as earnest as ever as he took his nine minor pills and placed them all into the pill furnace. He took a deep breath and, eyes filled with determination, began to concoct... a pill which conformed to his own Dao of alchemy! A pill which would be in accord with his skill, and would be a return to the simplicity of nature.

As the pills entered the pill furnace, Meng Hao's eyes slowly closed. His hands pushed out into the air as he began to concoct.

Meng Hao's actions on the screen went relatively unnoticed thanks to the shocking scene caused by Ye Feimu. The only people who seemed to notice were Fatty, Han Bei and An Zaihai.

Ye Feimu walked slowly up the steps, looking every bit like a Chosen. His screen was the only focal point atop the mountain; the only one who

could remotely compete was Chu Yuyan.

As far as the others, they had fallen far behind. After the time it takes an incense stick to burn, the old man who had been in second place finally concocted enough pills; the 9,937th step appeared. The pill furnace in front of him exploded, and the Nine Treasures Pearl Curtain plant disappeared. This indicated that he had reached his peak.

He took a deep breath as he began to ascend the stairs.

Behind him, time continued to pass. The remaining candidates continued to persevere; to be able to participate in this trial by fire indicated that these were no ordinary alchemists. They might be a bit slower, but even the least among the group was able to create more than 9,600 stairs before his pill furnace exploded and he proceeded up.

Unfortunately, missing hundreds of stairs in the Violet East Mountain trial by fire was an indication of failure. Several people were forced pale-faced to admit defeat when they reached the end of the stairs they had created. Only a middle-aged man happened to succeed.

Of the group of eight just now, only five were left. Four had already succeeded; only Meng Hao was still concocting a medicinal pill.

Other than Fatty, Han Bei and An Zaihai, no one else was paying any attention to him at all. All of them were looking at the screens of Ye Feimu and Chu Yuyan.

Until... about half an incense stick later, the faint sound of thunder suddenly echoed out. This attracted some attention; almost immediately, more thunder could be heard, this time much clearer. Everyone suddenly began to look around, confused, trying to figure out which screen the sound was coming from.

When their eyes finally came to rest on Meng Hao's screen, thunder pealed out for the third time, echoing out loud enough to shake the Heavens and rock the Earth, filling the entire world of the Celestial Land which could be seen on the screens. More and more people turned their gazes from Ye Feimu and Chu Yuyan, to look at Meng Hao.

Immediately, they began to gape.

This was because, although Meng Hao's expression was one of unprecedented concentration, above the pill furnace in front of him was a roiling black cloud three hundred meters in diameter. It looked exactly the same as the cloud which had appeared above Ye Feimu.

"Fang Mu...."

"Don't tell me he also concocted some type of astonishing pill?"

As astonishment spread throughout the mountain peak, An Zaihai began to breathe heavily, and his eyes shone with an incredible light. His unusual expression immediately attracted the notice of the other Violet Furnace Lords.

Suddenly, another incredible peal of thunder boomed out, far more intense than the previous three, by at least ten times. Meng Hao's pill furnace trembled violently. Up above, the Tribulation cloud rapidly expanded, from three hundred meters to three thousand!

This caused shock to fill the hearts of everyone in the outside world. But then, a fifth, a sixth and then a seventh Heaven-shaking thunderclap rang out!

The thunder shook the Celestial Land, and the screens began to flicker, as if they were experiencing some sort of interference. Tribulation clouds swelled outward; by now, they were several tens of thousands of meters in diameter. The scene caused the minds of the Cultivators in the outside world to reel.

"What's... what's going on...?"

"What medicinal pill did he concoct to cause this?! Ye Feimu's pill didn't provoke such shocking Tribulation clouds!!"

Everyone was in an uproar; it was impossible for them not to be astonished. Before, they had believed the scene caused by Ye Feimu to be incredible, but now they were struck dumb. This... was truly incredible!

The thunder echoed out throughout almost the entire world of the

Celestial Land. The sound of thunder rose up to the Heavens. Now, it wasn't just Meng Hao's screen that was flickering, but all of the screens. They distorted and twisted so violently that it seemed they might rip apart and disintegrate.

Even more shocking was that clearly visible to everyone on the mountaintop outside, the rest of the candidates had all stopped in their tracks. Their expressions flickered and began to fill with disbelief.

Obviously, all of them could hear the thunder and see the Tribulation clouds. This caused shock to fill everyone's hearts. Ye Feimu's pill had definitely caused an extraordinary sight. However, only he had been able to see it. The candidates were all within the Celestial Land, and on the same Mountain. However, they were treading different paths, so no matter what the others did, they wouldn't be able to see or sense it.

But right now, a shocking scene was unfolding. The booming caused by Meng Hao's medicinal pill was breaking through any such barriers, making it so that all the candidates could see the Tribulation clouds.

"How could this be happening...?"

"Furnace Lord Fang Mu, what... what is he doing...?"

Fatty stared open mouthed, panting. Suddenly, an excited glow filled his eyes, and his body began to tremble. Inside, he was yelling out, crying for Meng Hao to become famous. It seemed possible that he was more excited at the moment than Meng Hao was.

Han Bei's eyes glittered; her expression quickly returned to normal, but inside, she was thinking that this was what she had expected of Fang Mu.

An Zaihai sat there cross-legged, his eyes shining with an intense light. All of the other Violet Furnace Lords were staring with unprecedented concentration at what was happening.

It was at this moment that the ninth thunderclap rose up.

Its appearance caused the entire world of the Celestial Land to quake. Atop Violet East Mountain, Chu Yuyan, Ye Feimu and the others all felt the shaking.

Up above them, they saw the sky completely covered with endless Tribulation clouds. They were huge and never-ending, thick, black and stacked in layers. As the booming rattled out, an uncountable amount of lightning bolts began to surge about in the clouds. The power on display was astonishing.

“Who is doing this...?” murmured Chu Yuyan, her face pale. It was as if she had lost her mind; she had no way to see who had instigated such a shocking scene. The first person who appeared in her mind was Ye Feimu. However, for some unknown reason, his image was suddenly replaced by someone who made her feel incredibly irritated.

Ye Feimu’s face drained of blood. He stared mutely up into the sky, one expression after another flickering across his face. Disbelief, confusion and a variety of other complicated expressions appeared. His mind was suddenly blank.

What happened next was even more astonishing. As the ninth thunderclap could be heard, it wasn’t Ye Feimu, Chu Yuyan and the others on East Violet Mountain who were shocked.... Completely unpredictable was that this ninth thunderclap influenced the outside world! In the sky above Eastern Emergence Mountain, black, roiling clouds suddenly appeared. Within them, lighting danced back and forth, and a rumbling roaring could be heard.

When this happened, An Zaihai leaped to his feet. The other Violet Furnace Lords who sat around him also had expressions of shock written on their faces. Pill Demon sat there quietly for a moment, then lifted up his right hand and flicked his finger.

The same move he had used to dissipate Ye Feimu’s Tribulation clouds, was enough to get rid of the thunder and Tribulation in the outside world. However, the Tribulation clouds within the Celestial Land were still there.

Seeing that the Tribulation clouds were about to reach the point where they would erupt, Meng Hao began to sweat. However, his eyes filled with determination. After the space of a few breaths passed, he growled then pushed out both hands toward the pill furnace.

As he did this, a roaring sound filled the air. Popping sounds rang out as cracks spread out over the surface of the pill furnace. A moment later, it exploded, and a colorless medicinal pill flew out. Suddenly, the Tribulation clouds up above began to shrink in on themselves. A massive lightning bolt, as thick as a person, began to descend.

Pill Demon's eyes glittered, and he said, "Disperse!"

It was one word. However, it caused the entire world of the Celestial Land to suddenly tremble as if some new intangible rule had been proclaimed within it. This rule seemed as if it could affect everything inside; it warped the sky, changed the lightning bolt, covered the Tribulation clouds, causing them to suddenly... disappear. It was as if the sky had instantly been replaced.

Meng Hao stretched out his hand and grasped the semi-transparent medicinal pill.

Everything was still and quiet in the outside world. All eyes were glued to Meng Hao's screen, and his right hand. The master alchemists, Furnace Lords, Violet Furnace Lords, and all the disciples of the visiting Sects, even the late Nascent Soul stage sub-Patriarchs, were all staring at the same thing.

What they wanted to know was, considering this medicinal pill had elicited such a shocking reaction, something that had even rippled out into the outside world....

How many stone steps would it create?!

Chapter 287: Creating Something out of Nothing

A moment passed, and there were still nine stone steps. Not one more, not one less.

Nonetheless, no one made a single comment. This was because... Meng Hao opened his hand, and the transparent medicinal pill therein floated up to hover in front of him. Then... it blossomed with nine, glowing coloured lights. The light emanated out from the pill, slowly forming into the shape of a Nine Treasures Pearl Curtain Plant!

The plant was vivid and lifelike, and the instant it appeared, it attracted everyone's attention. The gazes were filled with countless thoughts. Shock, amazement, and disbelief filled everyone's minds until they were complete blanks.

An Zaihai's voice broke the silence. "This is... creating something out of nothing!!" He was panting as he once again rose to his feet. Earlier, he had guessed that this might happen, but to see it with his own eyes sent his mind reeling and shook his heart.

Normally he would never have made such an outburst. He was an alchemist, and stubborn pursuit was part of the Dao of alchemy. He was the type of eccentric who would never reveal his emotions regardless of whether he was happy or furious. But in this regard, his sentiments ruled him.

"The Great Dao of alchemy. Returning to the simplicity of nature! Creating something out of nothing!!" As An Zaihai's voice echoed out, everyone watched the screen as Meng Hao lifted his foot onto the first step. He walked slowly up the nine steps, then raised his foot out into the emptiness. As it descended, a tenth step appeared. He walked forward. As he did, more steps appeared beneath his feet.

The limitation of number had already been exceeded; this was a realm far past that of Ye Feimu. Most people didn't even understand such a

realm; however, the eight Violet Furnace Lords did!

His heart trembling, mind reeling, Lin Hailong was the second to rise to his feet. With a gasp, he said, "This... this is... Fang Mu didn't just concoct a pill, he concocted a seed! A Nine Treasures Pearl Curtain Plant seed!!" Shock filled his eyes. "It's impossible... He took an illusory model based on the Dao of alchemy, and then concocted a real seed!!

"If you plant this seed, there is a high likelihood that within a few years, a Nine Treasures Pearl Curtain Plant will grow. But... but... the ingredients he used were all illusory, not real! This realm... it is creating something out of nothing!"

After An Zaihai and Lin Hailong finished speaking, silence reigned. The master alchemists sat mutely in their places. The Furnace Lords were breathing heavily. All of the people who had been laughing at him earlier now felt their minds spinning, as if they had been slapped in the face by an enormous, invisible palm. The slap had both cleared their minds and sent them reeling at the same time.

After the space of a few breaths passed, an incredible hubbub broke out.

"Creating something out of nothing? Fang Mu was able to take something that didn't really exist and use it to make something real? What level of skill in the Dao of alchemy does that represent? It's...."

"Is Ye Feimu the strongest? Or is this Fang Mu even better...?"

The people from the visiting Sects weren't able to discern what was going on. The only thing that was abundantly clear was the shock they saw on the faces of the Violet Furnace Lords.

Of their number, only Ye Yuntian had a gloomy look on his face. He frowned as he looked at Meng Hao's screen.

A breathtaking medicinal pill!

The disciples from the visiting Sects were shocked by the scene playing out in front of them. Truth be told, they had been shocked over and over from the moment this trial by fire began. However, this moment was the most shocking yet!

Creating something from nothing. Concocting pills in a Celestial Land. Refining the rules of alchemy. Turning an illusory Nine Treasures Pearl Curtain plant into an actual seed that could be planted. All of these things caused waves of shock to fill their minds.

As of now, they had forgotten Chu Yuyan and Ye Feimu. All eyes were fixed like glue onto Meng Hao. He was the focus of attention of all the people here.

Fatty was panting. Han Bei's eyes shone with a strange light as she looked at Meng Hao. Li Shiqi's expression was one of fascination. She herself had never imagined that Alchemist Fang Mu would concoct a pill such as this.

Chen Fan had never been very interested in Alchemy. But he gaped in astonishment, and admiration grew within his heart for Fang Mu.

Patriarch Violet Sieve from the Black Sieve Sect laughed. "Starting today, the name of Alchemist Fang Mu will be known to everyone within the Southern Domain."

Sub-Patriarchs from the other Clans laughed and said similar things. When their words entered Ye Yuntian's ears, his face grew unsightly, and unconsciously he glanced toward his Master, Pill Demon. Pill Demon's face was expressionless, which caused Ye Yuntian to sigh with relief.

Turning his head to look at the other Violet Furnace Lords, he said, "Unless Master makes a specific choice, then everyone has a chance. Fang Mu may have some unique skills in pill concocting, but... the general trend is clearly favoring Feimu to become the next Violet Furnace Lord!" He gave meaningful looks to those among the Violet Furnace Lords with whom he was close. He felt a bit more calm after that, and when he looked back at Meng Hao's screen, his expression was the same as ever. His heart, however, was filled with rancor and cold laughter.

Meng Hao had no way to know what was happening in the outside world. However, from the moment he had begun to concoct the pill, he had decided to make a big scene. At the moment, he was walking up the mountain path. Ahead of him was nothingness, but every step he took,

more stone steps would appear to support him.

Time passed. The buzz of conversation still filled the outside world when Meng Hao stepped onto the final stone step of the third region. He wasn't really sure how many total steps he had traversed. If he thought about it, then perhaps it was more than ten thousand.

Meng Hao didn't actually care about a specific number; it wasn't important.

"Who was it...?" thought Chu Yuyan, her breathing heavy. She still wasn't sure who had caused the shocking scene just now. Whoever it was, that person was on a different path. Unless they were at the peak of mountain, it would be very difficult to see anything. At the moment, the first person that came to mind was, again, Ye Feimu.

But then, she hesitated. Suddenly she wasn't so sure. Something inside of her was telling her that it probably wasn't Ye Feimu. And yet from her perspective, other than Ye Feimu, none of the other candidates, including herself, could possibly have done something like that.

As she thought, determination filled her eyes. She turned and continued upward.

The most conflicted of all was none other than Ye Feimu. He stood mutely on the stone steps, thinking for a very long time.

"Who was it? What pill did they concoct...? I concocted one medicinal pill, the pinnacle! I can't believe that someone else's decision regarding the Dao of alchemy could surpass my own. In the third region, I definitely produced the most steps with the least amount of medicinal pills! I only concocted one! This person could not possibly have outdone me!" Ye Feimu's pride caused pain in his heart, but it quickly vanished. "I must be in first place!"

His eyes glittering, he raced forward, hurrying toward the end of the third region. In his preparations to participate in this trial by fire, Violet Furnace Lord Ye Yuntian had actually violated Sect protocol by secretly telling him in detail about his own experience in the promotion trial by fire.

For example, Ye Feimu knew that at the end of the third region, it was possible to see who had passed through the region, what method they had used to do so, and what position they were granted by the Immortal Land.

His eyes filled with stubbornness, Ye Feimu hurried on, panting.

In addition to Chu Yuyan and Ye Feimu, there was also the old man and the middle-aged man. They were were also racing forward.

Time passed. The first person to reach the end of the third region was Chu Yuyan. She leaped across the gap created by the last few missing steps. Then, a tremor ran through her body. She had just seen the boulder marking the beginning of the fourth region. The first thing which entered her vision was not the requirements for concocting a pill, but rather, the rankings from the previous region, which floated in the air in front of the boulder.

In third place, was her own name, Chu Yuyan. Next to it were written the numbers 9,999!

She gasped, then looked up toward second place. It was Ye Feimu's name, and the number was 10,000.

"Ten thousand.... He really does deserve to be called Grandmaster Pill Cauldron. Ten thousand steps marks perfection in the third region. However... how could he possibly have only placed second...." She stared at the name for a moment, and her heart began to pound. Slowly, her gaze moved up until she saw the listing for first place. Instantly, a roaring sound filled her head, and her eyes shone with disbelief.

"How could it be him...?" She was suddenly out of sorts. The boulder was spewing out massive amounts of violet Qi, but she didn't notice. All she could do was stare at the rankings.

"Fang Mu!" muttered Ye Feimu, his body trembling slightly. His eyes filled with disbelief and, even more so, shame. If it had been Chu Yuyan who beat him, he could have accepted it. But instead, it was someone he completely looked down upon. Furthermore, that person had surpassed him in the third region.

As far as he was concerned this was a complete humiliation. Actually, from the moment Fang Mu had been raised to Furnace Lord, he had aroused the dislike of the other Furnace Lords. That was especially true for Ye Feimu. He held nothing but contempt for the manner in which Fang Mu had received his promotion.

Next, Ye Feimu's body trembled, and began to fill with rage. This was because he had just seen the numbers written after Fang Mu's name. 10.

"Ten stone steps.... Ten stone steps...? I created a perfect set of ten thousand stone steps! How could a trifling ten stone steps even compare! Just what pill did this Fang Mu concoct?" Ye Feimu wouldn't go so far as to question the fairness of the trial by fire, but inside, he just couldn't accept it.

By now, he had already put the pieces together, and realized who the Pill Tribulation had come for.

Violet Qi poured out from the boulder, but Ye Feimu felt a sense of irony. His eyes filled with a cold light.

Meng Hao stood in front of the fourth region boulder, looking at the rankings. His right hand lifted up, causing the image to scatter. Massive amounts of violet Qi poured out, dense to the extreme. Those watching in the outside world could easily see the boundless extent of the violet Qi, and how much it exceeded that of Chu Yuyan's and Ye Feimu's

Several hours passed, during which time, this point was even further impressed upon all onlookers.

Meng Hao's black pill furnace absorbed the violet Qi, and as it did, its color slowly changed. Now, it was no longer pitch black, but tinged with violet. At first glance, it would be hard to tell whether it was black or violet. However, the pill furnace was now struggling about half as much as it had before, and no longer as fiercely.

About an hour later, the violet Qi disappeared. Text gradually appeared on the boulder, revealing the requirements for the final region.

Become an apprentice!

Seeing these words caused Meng Hao's vision to suddenly blur and twist. The mountain in front of him was no longer a mountain. The sky above... was no longer the same sky!

Chapter 288: Peach Blossom

The mountain vanished. Far, far off in the distance, a mountain range was just barely visible.

The sky, was no longer blue. Instead, it was as red as flame, because it was dusk.

The dusk carried with it the afterglow of the setting sun, which trickled across the land to blanket over a small county-level city. The walls surrounding the city had existed for many years, which was clear from their ancient appearance. They were covered with blotches and marks, evidence of the passage of time.

Atop the walls, a few guards lazed about. Occasionally the faint sounds of their laughter and chatting would drift down into the bordello below. There was a new girl in town, and their laughter contained the beauty of anticipation which comes in life.

Horse carts lined up to enter through the city gate; atop each cart sat a driver brandishing a whip and bellowing out directions to his horses as they ambled toward the city center.

The sun was setting, but oppressive heat still held sway over the land, turning it into something like an oven that wanted to bake the earth.

There was no wind or rain.

The only thing that existed was arid heat.

This walled city was not very large; it was only a county after all. People walked the streets in groups of two or three, cooling themselves with fans, occasionally cursing the weather.

The most lively places in the town were the teahouses, where a cup of cold tea could dispel a bit of the heat. On a sweltering summer evening like this, gossiping with friends and neighbors there was the primary pastime of the populace.

Other than the teahouses was the town bordello, which was a place for rich people. Many men who passed by couldn't restrain themselves from

glancing up at the gorgeously dressed young ladies who leaned against the wooden shutters up above. It was enough to make any man's heart burn, and then cause him to think about how unbearable the weather was.

If a man's wife walked with him past the bordello, her face would twist with jealousy and she would hastily pull him away. A more shrewish wife might look up at the licentious, headstrong girls up above and curse them a few times.

It was said that the girls in the bordello were as delicate as flowers and as refined as jade, almost inhuman. Inside, the rooms were filled with ice cubes and cute servant girls with fans. Because of this, rich customers had the luxury of enjoying an ice-cold breeze.

Supposedly, the bordello also abounded with delicious food and wine.... Every man wished to go there, either for the girls, the food or the ice cubes.

"Look, the point is, this place is awesome!" said Meng Hao in a low, earnest voice to the two kids next to him, clenching his fists tightly. Both the kids were around the same age as him, twelve or thirteen years old. "You guys just don't have any sense of brotherhood!"

Meng Hao put his arms around their shoulders. One was skinny, the other chubby. Both looked excited, but at the same time, a bit shy and nervous.

Meng Hao gave them a very serious look, as if he were a Sect Patriarch arranging to hand over a legacy. "Tomorrow, I, young master, am being sent away to boarding school. From now on I'm handing over the title of Eastern Emergence County's #1 Bully to you two. Don't forget, you can't do anything to ruin young master's reputation!"

If... if they were in some sacred location, then perhaps his words would carry some power. But unfortunately, the three of them were currently lying on their bellies atop a wall.

What was inside the wall was nothing other than the bordello, and the wall they were on surrounded it. Further inside was a two-story building, connected to another building which filled the front of the courtyard.

From their position on the wall, they could clearly see the shadows of men and women inside the second story windows. The sound of chatting and laughter drifted out.

The fat kid, whose face was covered with freckles, excitedly said, "Young master Fang, don't worry. The name of the #1 Bully in Eastern Emergence County will always belong to you. As for us two, #2 and #3 Bullies, we will definitely maintain your reputation!" The skinny kid next to him nodded enthusiastically.

"Good, I know I can trust you two," Meng Hao replied solemnly. "However, you still need your gang initiation plaques. Today, your final test has arrived. Now pay attention. Soon, someone is gonna come out. When that happens, you have to throw these bricks as hard as you can!"

Each of the kids held a brick which was about the size of their own hand.

"That damned bastard!" said Meng Hao through gritted teeth. "He dares to go chasing after my Peach Blossom!? Young master is definitely going to find out who exactly it is who has the gall!" He glared at the second story of the building. Panting, he continued, "Peach Blossom promised me that she would wait until I grew up, and then she would sleep with me. Who could have guessed that some damned son of a bitch would dare to go pick on her!" His heart filled with rage. When the other two kids saw the look in his eyes, their hearts filled with intense admiration.

"He definitely deserves to be the Elder Brother," they thought. "The #1 Bully in Eastern Emergence County has a mistress. He's for sure the only twelve year old kid in the entire county who could pull that off!" They exchanged a glance, and their expressions grew more fanatical. As far as they were concerned, anyone who could enter the legendary bordello and get a mistress, had skill that reached to the Heavens. To be able to talk about it openly made them feel even more proud.

Soon, enough time had passed for an incense stick to burn. Evening had fallen, and the moon was rising. The second floor balcony door opened, and a beautifully dressed young woman led a middle-aged man out by the

arm. He appeared to be drunk, and they talked in soft tones as they emerged.

The moonlight was thin, and the sky somewhat dark, making it difficult to see their exact appearance. However, Meng Hao could instantly recognize Peach Blossom. Immediately, his eyes grew red, and he shouted, "You crusty son of a bitch, young master's gonna beat you to death! You dare to see my Peach Blossom!" With a howl, he hurled the brick. With equally vicious howls, the two kids also threw their bricks.

"Young master is gonna... huh?" Meng Hao was just about to charge into the courtyard when his body began to tremble. The drunk, middle-aged man easily dodged the three bricks and then raised his head furiously. As soon as he saw Meng Hao, he gave a slight smile. Then, his fury burned hotter.

"You little bastard!" he cried. "This is mutiny!"

Meng Hao instantly began to shiver.

"Father...." All of his ardor and sincerity evaporated, as if freezing water had been poured over his body. He immediately leaped off of the wall and began to run. His two sidekicks' faces went pale with fear, and their calves burned as they raced off.

"We're finished. Finished! Fang Mu's father is the former #1 Bully in the county! Now he's a constable, so he can kill people without blinking an eye...!" The two kids' faces were as pale as death as they fled.

After the three of them vanished, the middle-aged man stood in the courtyard, both angry and amused. The idea of a son making a move on his father was both infuriating and hilarious.

"That little bastard never studies and has no skills whatsoever. Sending him to study in boarding school is definitely the right decision!"

Late that night, Meng Hao ambled through the streets, heaving continuous sighs. When he finally reached the main gate of his house, he looked at the lights shining from within and gave a deep frown.

"Why did it have to be dad...? Oh, mother, you left too early. If you

hadn't gone, things wouldn't be like this. I'm going to go have a few words with him for you!" He had just pushed open the gate leading into the courtyard, when suddenly he began to cry.

"Mother, I miss you! Mother, you visited me in my dreams last night and told me to go visit Peach Blossom.... Mother...."

"Shut up!" bellowed an angry voice from within the house. The door opened to reveal Meng Hao's father, the middle-aged man from before. His brow was furrowed, and he looked haplessly at Meng Hao. "Quit your faking! Why aren't you in bed yet? I'm taking you to the boarding school early in the morning to meet your new teacher."

"I'm not going!" cried Meng Hao, taking a step back. "I want to go to regular school! All the people in the city are going to laugh at me!"

"You little bastard. Still up to the same old tricks at your age...." The man frowned, then suddenly rushed forward and grabbed Meng Hao, who was just getting ready to run away. He lifted him into the air and spanked him on the bottom a few times.

The slapping sounds rang out clearly, but there was no pain. Things had been like this for Meng Hao since he was young. He and his father had only each other to depend on. Every time they had some sort of disagreement, his father would put on the appearance of being very strict, but couldn't actually bear to hit him hard.

"What good is regular school?" his father roared. "You need to learn to respect the teachers and their teachings! You need to learn about ethics! Are you gonna go, or not!?"

"I'm not going!" cried Meng Hao, his eyes rolling.

"You...!" Meng Hao's father raised his hand high into the air.

Meng Hao hurriedly said, "If you promise to never go see Peach Blossom again, then I'll go.... You can go see anybody else, just not her!" He was afraid his father might actually start to spank him hard this time.

Meng Hao's father wasn't sure whether to laugh or cry. He lowered his hand, placing it onto Meng Hao's head and tousling it gently.

“Alright. You’re growing up, kid, and I can see that you have a fertile imagination. Fine. From now on, I’ll never see Peach Blossom again. I’ll leave her for you. After you grow up, I’ll arrange for her to be your concubine!”

“Really?” said Meng Hao, his eyes growing bright.

“You’re still not in bed?!” He glared at Meng Hao as he released him. Meng Hao beamed with joy as he ran into the house, threw off his clothes, and jumped into bed. He had some beautiful dreams that night.

Early the next morning, when the sky was just beginning to grow light, Meng Hao’s eyes were still blurry as his father dressed him.

Father glanced at son, and could see that he clearly hadn’t gotten enough sleep. A solemn expression covered his face, as well as love and kindness, something Meng Hao didn’t often see.

He reached down and picked up Meng Hao, just like he had when he was young. Meng Hao’s head fell onto his shoulder, and he continued to sleep. Meng Hao’s father grabbed the gift he planned to present to the teacher, and then left.

Along the way, his gait was a bit unsteady. Carrying such a large boy wasn’t an easy task.

An hour later, they reached the main gate of the house of a famous old man who lived in the east part of the city. Meng Hao’s father woke Meng Hao up and then put him down. Then, he knocked on the door, and entered the courtyard.

Meng Hao was left yawning out in the courtyard as his father entered the house, so he didn’t see his father respectfully clasping hands and making other imploring gestures.

Not much time passed before his father emerged. Next to him was an old man with a full head of white hair. His features were ancient, but full of vigor. It gave him a noble and prestigious bearing, much different from that of an ordinary person.

This was especially true of his eyes. They were filled with profundity, as

if they contained stars within them. Anyone who looked at them would be entranced. The old man gazed down at Meng Hao.

This gaze seemed to be able to see lives that had been lived, and lives yet to be lived.

This gaze seemed capable of piercing through the haze to see all three lives: past, present and future.

This gaze made it seem as if this young man's entire life had been lived for the purpose of coming here and kowtowing three times to become his apprentice.

A long moment passed, and the old man nodded slightly.

Meng Hao's father looked down at Meng Hao and said, "A Master is like a father. Fang Mu, I want you to respect your Master. Respect him even more than you respect me! If you can't do that, then you aren't my son!" With that, he left.

Chapter 289: Which Path to Choose?

Meng Hao gaped at his father. He'd forgotten how long it had been since he'd seen him act so strictly. The seriousness of his tone instantly caused him to wake up.

"A Master is like a father...." Meng Hao watched his father's back as he left. He clearly was wearing a simple, unlined robe. However, for some reason, it seemed to Meng Hao as if he were surrounded by a violet wind.

The wind seemed to shatter some barrier in his mind; suddenly an image appeared. It was his father. The image was blurry, but he could tell that his father was looking at him and sighing softly.

His mother was there too, gazing at him warmly. It looked like there were tears in her eyes.

For some reason... there was also a Tower of Tang, as well as many, many complicated memories. Meng Hao thought for a long moment before shaking his head roughly and turning to look off in the distance. There, in the middle of the county, was a very tall tower. It was... a Tower of Tang.

"That wasn't there before, was it...? No, it never was." A confused look appeared on Meng Hao's face.

In the midst of his vacantness, an ancient-sounding voice reached his ears. "This isn't a boarding school."

As his father disappeared into the distance, Meng Hao turned to look at the old man who stood in front of him. Now that his father was gone, only he and the old man were there in the courtyard.

The old man looked down at Meng Hao, then slowly continued, "Up to now, I've had seventeen apprentices. A few ended up returning to dust. A few left and forged their own path. There were also a few... who are still pondering what they wish to pursue. In fact, when you think about it, some don't really even count as my apprentices. As of today, you are my eighteenth apprentice. However, I'm actually going to call you... Little

Ninth.” As the man spoke in his ancient voice, all the sound in the air around Meng Hao seemed to fade until he was focused completely on the old man.

“You have a Junior Sister. She became my apprentice before you, but in a bit of an unorthodox fashion, so she ranks below you. She is surnamed Chu.”

Meng Hao wasn’t sure why, but he felt nervous. He didn’t know whether to get onto his knees and kowtow, or bend from the waist with clasped hands. He was completely ill at ease.

“I haven’t used my own name for a long time,” said the old man. “Outsiders usually call me by my alchemist name, whereas friends usually call me Mr. East. I’ve never been married, so I have no heir. My apprentices are my heirs. Eventually, you will pass on my teachings, and the mark I have made on the world, will be extended by you. As far as I am concerned, you apprentices are... my closest relatives.” The old man gazed at Meng Hao, looking very majestic. However, his eyes were warm and filled with kindness and love. It seemed almost as if he had been watching Meng Hao for years, and had been testing him for a very long time. “From now on, I’m your Master!”

Without thinking, Meng Hao responded, “Respect Master, venerate the Dao. Master is like a father. I...”

“There’s no need to say such things,” said the old man, his eyes gleaming with a keen light. “As long as they exist in your heart, that is enough. Little Nine, kneel!” In the blink of an eye, his entire person seemed to become the pinnacle of Heaven and Earth.

Meng Hao couldn’t really describe exactly what he was feeling. It was as if in this instant, the old man had become the Heavens. And yet, he was not cold, but instead filled with deep kindness and warmth. It was as if he were a mountain that could shield against wind and rain alike.

Meng Hao bowed his head and got down on his knees.

As he was kneeling, he could not see how everything above him in the sky had stopped moving. The clouds were still. The birds no longer flitted

about. The earth did not quake, but everything within the city grew silent.

“As my apprentice, you only kowtow twice in life, at least in the true sense of the word. The first time is upon becoming an apprentice. This kowtow sows Karma with me, whereupon our fates are intertwined. If you do not break this connection, then neither shall I! As for the second kowtow, wait until you come to your senses, then come ask me about it, and I will tell you.

“The first kowtow upon becoming an apprentice is actually divided into three further kowtows, those of the Innocence, the Roaming, and the Sunset Gazing. Your kowtow today is the kowtow of Innocence.”

Meng Hao didn't really understand. However, he placed his hands onto the ground and kowtowed deeply.

With this kowtow, the sky sprung back into motion. The winds and the clouds swept along. The birds flew!

With this kowtow, the earth shook, as past events flitted dream-like through the minds of all the living creatures.

With this kowtow, past life Karma, future Karma, present life.... If you do not sever it, then I shall not sever it!

The old man laughed contentedly. It echoed about, filled with emotion, satisfaction, kindness and duty.

From this day forward, the young man in front of him was his apprentice. In the future, the young man's every action would be marked by him. From now on he was... the young man's Master!

This is Karma. Karma is not something predestined, but something decided by people. It can be called fate; not fate determined by the Heavens, nor doom from the underworld, but something decided between two people.

One person decides to take another as Master; the other decides to take an apprentice. This creates... Karma!

His voice soft, the old man said, “You must still experience the kowtow

of Roaming, and the kowtow of Sunset Gazing. Throughout the process, you will be able to choose from many paths. As for which path you choose... that is your decision. If in the end you are able to perform the kowtow of Sunset Gazing, then that will name us Master and apprentice. No one will ever be able to sever that bond! I will accept no gifts in becoming your Master; I have already accepted everything I need to accept.” He reached down and softly tousled Meng Hao’s hair. His smile was kind as he helped Meng Hao to his feet.

Meng Hao still didn’t really understand. As he stood, he looked at his master, and could feel the kindness and love within him. Beneath the man’s gaze, he could also feel a warmth deep inside of himself.

He nodded his head solemnly.

Springs and autumns came and went. Years passed. Meng Hao was now nineteen years old. In the past seven years, he spent most of his time living with Master, studying, observing the cool breeze and the white clouds, gazing up at the moon and the stars.

After reading from many books, he finally understood what it meant to respect Master and venerate the Dao. He also understood that the world was a very large place.

During the seven years, his father had aged quite a bit. Master had grown even older. Peach Blossom’s popularity in the bordello waned. Eventually, some moneybags from another county paid her debts and took her as a concubine.

Before she left, she came looking for Meng Hao. It seemed she viewed him as something like a little brother. She spoke some tender words, then, accompanied by Meng Hao’s smile, got into a sedan chair and left Eastern Emergence County.

According to their agreement from years ago, his two friends really did grow up to become the biggest bullies in the county.

Meng Hao, however, no longer called himself a bully. He didn’t wear fancy, expensive clothes, but instead, a simple scholar’s robe.

It was green, just like the greenness of his youth. However, in just the same manner that spring changes into autumn, his face no longer carried the frivolity it used to, but instead, calmness. He liked to think, and to gaze off into the sky, even though he didn't really know exactly what it was he was looking at.

He liked the wind and the rain. He liked to stand in the pavilion and look at the lightning off in the distance, and hear the thunder. When the rain fell down onto the earth outside, he liked to open up a book and read about how life had changed throughout the ages.

Everything was like a dream. Seven years passed like the falling of a rainstorm. Meng Hao didn't feel like he had changed much, but from the perspective of others, he had changed quite a bit.

As he watched his Master continue to grow older, he often thought of bringing up the subject of the Roaming. He wanted to climb mountains, travel to distant lands, to see the realities of the world.

But in the end, he looked at the city, his father, and Master, and instead maintained his silence, saying nothing.

A year. Another year... soon, seven more years had passed. During autumn of that year, as the leaves drifted down to the ground, floating in the wind to return to the earth, his father fell sick. One night, a violet wind blew, and his father passed away.

Meng Hao stood in front of his father's grave, a blank look in his eyes. He vaguely remembered how, fourteen years ago, his father had held him in his arms and taken him to meet Master. In the blink of an eye, fourteen years had passed. Meng Hao stood there silently, sipping from a pot of alcohol.

Finally he turned and left. He found Master, and told him how he desired the Roaming. It was the only dream he possessed now, and had been fermenting in his heart for years.

Before he left, Meng Hao kneeled before Master and kowtowed a second time. This was... the kowtow of Roaming.

Master watched early one morning as Meng Hao shouldered his scholar's pack and walked off into the distance, framed by the rising sun.

Eventually, Meng Hao looked over his shoulder. By that time, Master was no longer visible. Later, he looked over his shoulder a second time, and even the Tower of Tang couldn't be seen.

He was thoughtful for a moment, then gradually seemed to come to an understanding. He looked forward once again, and continued to walk off into the distance. He did not look over his shoulder a third time.

He reached a mighty river and encountered a ferryman, with whom he chatted about some of the legends of the river. Supposedly, an Immortal resided somewhere here.

In the books Meng Hao had read, he had occasionally come across the title Immortal. He decided to live next to the river. Unfortunately, in the three years that he did, he never saw an Immortal. What he did see, however, was his own inverted reflection in the river waters, a different him.

He saw himself flying in the sky, practicing cultivation in the mountains, and some place called the East Pill Division of the Violet Fate Sect, where he concocted....

It seemed as if all he had to do was jump into the water, and he could become that other person, and this life would be over.

By the time the three years had passed, Meng Hao was twenty nine years old. In the end, he did not jump into the water. Instead, he left the river and travelled far off to another place.

A year later, in the depths of a seemingly endless forest, on a blustery and nearly moonless night, Meng Hao caught sight of woman floating in the air. There was also an abandoned tomb, with no incense burning in front of it. The surrounding forest was pitch black, and Meng Hao was a bit scared. A moment later, he found himself surrounded by countless shadowy forms. Suddenly, a sealing incantation popped into his mind.

He extended his palm, and everything around him vanished.

Starting then, he was very curious about this dark, mysterious forest. He

continued to travel about in it, sleeping in thickets when necessary. He saw many, many strange things, including a variety of fantastic fierce and wild beasts.

It took three years to travel through the forest. When he emerged, he looked back, and an absentminded look covered his face. He had the feeling that if he wished, he could stay and become a part of the forest.

In a place like this, a person could become one with Heaven and Earth, and transcend the mortal life.

As Meng Hao gazed at the forest, he thought back to Master's words from twenty-one years ago. There are many paths in life, as to which path he would choose... that was his decision to make.

"This place is not the path I wish to tread." Lost in thought, Meng Hao turned and walked off into the distance.

Chapter 290: This Life

Two years later, Meng Hao was thirty-five years old. It had been nine years since he left home. However, during that entire time, he had only lived in two places, the river and the forest.

This year, he ran into a gang of bandits.

Bandits are generally killers, but they didn't kill Meng Hao. Perhaps it was because of his worn scholar's robe, or the scholar's pack that he wore on his back. He certainly looked down on his luck. The bandit leader was a beautiful, seductive woman. She asked him a single question.

"Can you keep financial records?"

Meng Hao shook his head. However, they took him anyway. They led him to their mountain fort, which was really a stockaded village where more than a thousand people lived. Most of them were the family members of the bandits, including quite a few children.

It was arranged for Meng Hao to become a teacher, which mostly involved instructing the children how to read. He didn't have to teach anything very complicated. They just needed to be able to read bank notes and understand basic messages, things that any good bandit should be able to do.

This was a requirement laid upon all the bandits by the beautiful bandit Chieftess.

Time trickled by. Meng Hao adapted himself, and quickly felt at home. He taught reading, and looked up at the sky. It was almost like life in Eastern Emergence County. Sometimes he thought of Master, or of his father, and how he hadn't gone back to sweep his grave for a very long time.

People died every month in the mountain fort. During a three year period, the camp moved locations twice. In the fourth year, the army came. The mountain fort faced overwhelming numbers; at a critical moment of life and death, Meng Hao unhesitatingly proposed using

poison.

At the moment, a north wind was blowing, and the army was located to the south.

Meng Hao wasn't sure why exactly he had thought of using poison. It was just that, in the past few years, he seemed to have an abundance of knowledge in his head. The poison... was of course concocted by Meng Hao.

As the poison powder drifted south with the wind, Meng Hao closed his eyes. A long time later, he heard shouts of rejoicing. It had been a massacre. The mountain village had won.

Meng Hao was thirty-nine years old. That night, during the third watch, something like burning fire burrowed under the covers with him. It was the bandit Chieftess. During the day she was a conservative woman, but right now she was like a beautiful spirit.

Overnight, Meng Hao's life changed. He was no longer a teacher, but instead, a so-called military adviser. He had never experienced such a life before. It was fresh and exciting. Soon he was forty years old. He was past the prime of life when the blood boiled. And yet all of this was... addicting.

Killing. Plundering. For three years, no blood physically stained Meng Hao's hands. However, with his assistance, the number of lives taken by the bandits increased by tenfold.

That winter, Meng Hao finally got fed up with it all. He had not chosen this life, and he wanted to leave. But by now, the mountain fort had grown very large. When he brought up leaving, the beautiful Chieftess refused to allow it.

But Meng Hao... persisted, and left the mountain fort anyway. Therefore, they tried to chase him down and kill him.

They chased him for a year before finally giving up. In the end, Meng Hao wasn't killed. Exhausted, he turned, and there, one hundred or so paces behind him, was the Chieftess. She sat atop a horse, staring at him, a big black bow in her hand. She was older, but still beautiful, and within

her eyes was a torn expression.

The wind blew past the two of them. Meng Hao shouldered the same scholar's pack he'd taken with him when he left his hometown, turned around, and walked off into the distance.

No arrow was loosed from the bow.

That year, Meng Hao was forty-three years of age.

Eventually, he caught sight of a Daoist temple located on top of a mountain.

It was autumn, and the leaves rustled as they drifted down onto the green limestone of the temple. The sky was overcast, and occasionally the soft rumbling of thunder could be heard. Rain was coming.

Meng Hao took up residence in the Daoist temple. He watched the Daoists practice their religious cultivation, observed them live their daily lives, and enjoyed a kind of peace he had never experienced before.

He had the unshakeable feeling that his hands were stained dark with blood that just wouldn't wash off. Perhaps in this place he could discover a way to cleanse it.

Two years later, Meng Hao was forty-five years old. He let out a soft sigh.

"It turns out there's no way to cleanse it. In that case, I'll just have to live with it." Shaking his head, he bid farewell to the Daoist temple, and strode out once again into the world.

Eventually, he reached the capital city. After he had been living there for a year, a bloody war broke out with a neighbouring nation. Despite his age, Meng Hao was forcefully conscripted into the military, and became a soldier in the army. The war between the two countries had just started at this point.

Two years into the war, Meng Hao used some poison that he had concocted to win a battle that shocked both of the countries involved. This sparked his rise to prominence. He was no longer a common soldier, but a Poison Specialist.

Five years into the war, he was a General. He led a special offensive, commanding a force of one hundred thousand soldiers, along with a special unit of one hundred personally trained Poison Specialists.

Eight years into the war, the enemy withdrew from the battlefield and turned to defense. Meng Hao was more than fifty years old, and his name was famous throughout the entire nation. He led his men into the enemy nation in a campaign to destroy them thoroughly.

By the tenth year of the war, Meng Hao was fifty-six. It had been thirty years since he left his hometown. The enemy was destroyed. He returned to his home country, and was welcomed with grand ceremony.

He was now a legend, and as such, was conferred with the title Royal Advisor.

Everything was like a dream, and Meng Hao wasn't used to it. Perhaps it was because of him or perhaps because of the country's growing power, but after becoming the Royal Advisor, the country turned into an aggressor. A new round of wars began.

Year after year passed, and eventually, Meng Hao was sixty years old. Once again fed up with everything, he left the army and returned to the areas that had been scorched by the flames of war. Pestilence raged there. He was able to save the lives of a few people, after which, he was the Royal Adviser no longer, but a doctor, the Alchemy Doctor.

He continued to travel, pursuing the dream he'd had when he was young, climbing mountains and traveling to distant lands.

However many people he had killed in the past, that was how many he would save.

His travels lasted for twenty years.

Throughout those twenty years, Meng Hao traveled through countless nations and climbed to the top of who knew how many mountain peaks. He saved many people, and soon, word of "the miraculous hands of the Alchemy Doctor" spread throughout the land.

The year Meng Hao turned eighty, he looked thoughtfully up into the

sky. His weathered face was covered with the evidence of a life full of memories.

“I’ve traveled many paths in life,” he thought to himself, “but as for my choice... just what is it...? I did not choose to be the reflection in the water of the river. Nor did I choose to live the peaceful life of a hermit in the forest. I absolutely did not want to live the romantic life of a bandit couple, nor did I choose to become a Daoist priest.... I’ve long since given up on being a Poison Specialist or a Royal Advisor, on waging war.... I thought that my final decision would be to become an Alchemy Doctor. But now that I look back... that’s not my path either. Just what am I pursuing in this life?” He looked up into the sky, but could not think of any answer to the question. The only thing he found was more frustration, and deep exhaustion.

He missed home. That autumn night, he sat beneath the stars looking up at the sky. Next to his foot was a fallen leaf. He didn’t notice as the wind whispered through the forest, picked it up, and returned it back to the tree it had fallen from. At the moment, he was somewhat like that leaf. He had been way from home for almost a full sixty year cycle. Now, he needed to return.

Meng Hao began to walk. After he had left home, it had taken him fifty four years to reach this point. The return trip only took six.

Eastern Emergence County was still there, flourishing more than ever. Meng Hao’s hair was white when he entered the city. He was just barely able to make out some of the traces of the past.

The bordello was gone. The wall had long since been knocked down, and the location was now home to a large mansion.

The house where he grew up had vanished with the passing of time. In its place was an inn. Meng Hao stood across from it for a very long time, staring at it. His face was covered not just with the ravages of time, but with a complex expression. Finally, he turned and left.

When he returned to Master’s house, the person who opened the door was a stranger. After making some enquiries, Meng Hao turned his head

to look at East Mountain off in the distance.

His father had been buried there more than fifty years ago. Master had been buried there more than twenty years ago.

Meng Hao sighed. Silently holding a pot of alcohol under his arm, he climbed the mountain. First, he visited his father's grave, which was covered in weeds. "I know this is all an illusion," he said softly, "and that you aren't my real father. However... you let me feel the fatherly love that I've been missing. It was only a simple embrace so that I could sleep...." About thirty years ago, in the Daoist temple, he had come to understand everything. This world was nothing but an illusion, a test to become an apprentice.

The real Meng Hao was still in the world of the Celestial Land in the Violet Fate Sect, atop Violet East Mountain.

He closed his eyes. A long time passed before he left his father's grave. Finally, he arrived at Master's grave. He looked at it for a while before speaking.

"Becoming an apprentice involves three kowtows," he murmured. "The first is during the time of innocence. The second is in the time of roaming. The third is when gazing at the sunset.... You gave me an entire life to decide whether or not to become your apprentice. Everything in this realm of illusions was created, not by you, but me. You only provided the starting point. Every person in the trial by fire will create their own world.

"In this world, I liberated my heart. I... I experienced everything. In the end, I've come back here. But I still haven't found what it is that I wish to pursue....

"The Dao of alchemy? Obviously not." He lifted the jug of alcohol and took a long drink.

"Eternal life?" he said quietly. "I'm not qualified." Soon, the sun began to sink in the west, and the jug of alcohol was empty. He did not begin the third kowtow. Instead, he turned and headed back toward Eastern Emergence County.

He knew that once he performed the third kowtow, he would leave this world of illusions. But he still had not found his answer. Therefore, he would not leave. He would stay.

From then on, a very old man took up residence in Eastern Emergence County.

Outside of the world of illusions, within the Violet Fate Celestial Land, atop Violet East Mountain, tears seeped out of Chu Yuyan's eyes. She opened them, and they were filled with grief, as if being immersed in her world had caused her to forget about reality.

A long time passed, and then a tremor ran through her body. She blinked. Her eyes were filled with confusion at first, but they quickly grew clearer. Her expression was one of melancholy. Eventually, she looked up and saw that there were two others with her here high atop Violet East Mountain.

One was Fang Mu. The other was Ye Feimu. Both of them had their eyes closed. One had a face filled with thoughtfulness, the other, confusion. The former was Meng Hao, the latter was Ye Feimu.

As for her, she was still about ten paces from the very peak of the mountain. Further behind her were the other two nameless candidates in the trial by fire.

It was at this moment that Ye Feimu suddenly trembled and began to awaken.

Chapter 291: A Thousand Pills Form a Cauldron!

Bitterness arose from deep within Chu Yuyan's heart. She thought about everything that had happened within her world of illusions. Then she looked up toward the two trial by fire candidates who were at the peak of the mountain.

One was Fang Mu, whose presence, she felt, was somewhat of an accident. For some reason, though, she also felt like she had known all along that it would happen like this.

Then there was Ye Feimu, Chosen of the Dao of alchemy. Were he not there, she would have been surprised.

"I lost..." she said with a sigh, then turned and began to walk down the mountain. This mountain could be ascended, but not descended. One step back signified forfeiture, and departure from the Celestial Land.

As her foot descended, her vision blurred. When everything grew clear again, she was back on the peak of Eastern Emergence mountain. She looked over at the alchemists of the East Pill Division, and then the Cultivators from the visiting Sects. Finally, she understood; these people could not see what had happened inside her world of illusions.

This was because as she turned her head to look at the screens projected by the pill furnace, all she could see was Fang Mu's thoughtful expression, not the world he was in.

"Welcome back," said Pill Demon with a slight smile.

Chu Yuyan suddenly wanted to weep. The realism of the world of illusions had lasted until the moment she returned to reality, and it was still hard to tell one from the other. Wordlessly, she walked over to stand next to Pill Demon.

After Chu Yuyan, the old man and the middle-aged man appeared in quick succession, also having admitted defeat. Their eyes were vacant as they walked toward the other alchemists and then sat down cross-legged.

They seemed as if their souls had been lost, and all they could do was stare blankly.

Hushed discussions immediately sprang up.

“Just what exactly did they experience in the final test in the world of illusions? Why do they all look so confused?” Even the majority of the master alchemists of the East Pill Division were unclear about the details and began to make various speculations.

Seeing the questioning looks on their disciples’ faces, the sub-Patriarchs from the various Sects began to discuss the matter.

“The world of illusions in the Violet Fate Sect’s Celestial Land uses the heart as a seed upon which to grow illusions. Under the influence of this art, no one would be able to tell the true from the false, not even someone with a Nascent Soul Cultivation base. You can never come to your senses within the illusion; therefore, it is really another life.”

“Yes, exactly. While inside, previous and future lives don’t matter, because it’s a dreamland. As for telling the difference between reality and the dream, between the past lives and the future... well, few people nowadays could do that.”

“Upon waking, the illusions will shatter, and that is when they wake up. That’s why they look so confused.”

It seemed as if they were simply discussing the matter, however, what they were actually doing was taking advantage of this East Pill Division trial by fire to train their disciples about the difference between reality and illusion.

After all, it wasn’t often that a spectacle such as this could be observed; any enlightenment derived therefrom was nothing more than luck.

Li Shiqi muttered to herself for a moment and then quietly asked, “The illusion shatters the moment they wake up? What happens if someone gains enlightenment, but the illusion doesn’t shatter? Would it be possible for them to gain even deeper enlightenment?”

Next to her, Tu Luo coolly responded, “For the moment, don’t even

contemplate the value of such enlightenment. If someone becomes clearheaded, and is able to prevent the world of illusion from collapsing, well... that would require incredibly powerful Spiritual Sense. In fact, it would require Dao enlightenment! Therefore, something like that can only happen serendipitously, and not by choice. In my entire life, I've only seen one person do such a thing."

Off to the side, the second Dao Lord of the Solitary Sword Sect heard their interchange and added, "Furthermore, doing such a thing is incredibly dangerous. The more time that passes, the more likelihood by the time that person came to their senses, they would be lost, and never be able to emerge."

As everyone engaged in their discussions, a rippling buzz filled the air as people noticed that Ye Feimu had awoken. They watched the screen as he looked over at Meng Hao. A dark look washed across his face. However, in the end, he chose to retreat, leaving the world of the Celestial Land and returning to the peak of Eastern Emergence Mountain.

The moment he appeared, calls of welcome could be heard coming from the mouths of the various alchemists he was close to.

"Congratulations in your efforts to secure the win, Furnace Lord Ye. Your rise to Violet Furnace Lord will bring about a true golden age for the East Pill Division!"

"Furnace Lord Ye, as Grandmaster Pill Cauldron, your efforts to secure the win are simply a formality. I'm just afraid that the visitors from the outside Sects might still be curious about the details of everything."

"Congratulations Furnace Lord Ye...."

As one person after another spoke out from the crowd, Ye Feimu's expression was no longer proud. With a slight smile, he clasped hands to the crowd. As for the title of Pill Cauldron, he hesitated, neither endorsing it, nor offering any explanation. This, of course, created a feeling of tacit approval.

While everyone was looking at Ye Feimu, Furnace Lord Ye Yuntian gave a hearty laugh. He stood and looked approvingly toward Ye Feimu.

“Feimu, why don’t you take out your pill furnace so everyone can see that you are qualified to be a Violet Furnace Lord!” Immediately, the eyes of the surrounding alchemists began to glow brightly.

An Zaihai’s brow furrowed, but he didn’t say anything.

Ye Feimu took a deep breath, and then once again, a proud expression covered his face. He smacked his bag of holding with his right hand to produce the pill furnace. It was none other than the one he had acquired within the world of the Mother of Furnaces. It had started out white, but was now violet, and emitted a violet glow which caused the glimmers of violet to reflect within the eyes of all the observing Cultivators.

Ye Yuntian looked at the violet furnace and immediately let out a loud laugh. He turned toward Pill Demon, clasped hands, and bowed deeply.

“Congratulations, Master,” he said excitedly. “It appears that this Violet Furnace Lord promotion has resulted in you acquiring a new apprentice, and that we have acquired a new Junior Brother. Feimu, why haven’t you bowed to your new Master yet?”

A glow of excitement also appeared in Ye Feimu’s eyes. He took a deep breath, and was just about to walk forward, when An Zaihai spoke up. “Junior Brother Ye,” he said coolly, “this is somewhat incongruous with protocol.”

The interchange between the two immediately caused the expressions of the six other Violet Furnace Lords to flicker. However, they didn’t reveal what they were thinking. The expressions of the Furnace Lords, however, all changed; naturally they could pick up on what was happening.

Ye Yuntian’s goal was all too obvious. That having been said, the Furnace Lords generally didn’t favor Fang Mu, and most of them liked Ye Feimu. Each and every one of them watched with various thoughts and ideas running through their heads.

As far as the ordinary master alchemists, not many of them understood what was going on. However, they could pick up on some of the clues. They watched on, speechless, waiting to see what would happen. The sub-Patriarchs from the other Sects were all experienced and astute; how could

they not see what was going on?

In fact, they had begun to expect this development some time ago. Of course, they were more than happy to watch such a scene unfold.

Fatty watched on wide-eyed. He glared at Ye Feimu, and had long since begun to curse him inwardly.

Pill Demon was the big exception. From the very beginning, he hadn't said a single word. It was as if he hadn't heard or seen anything that had transpired.

As all eyes came to fall upon the scene, Ye Yuntian gave a slight smile. "Oh?" he said, a strange note in his voice. "Elder Brother An, Junior Brother doesn't really understand what you mean. Would you mind clearing up my confusion?"

"Ye Feimu wasn't the only person to step foot onto the peak of the mountain," replied An Zaihai calmly.

Ye Yuntian laughed loudly. "Oh, so that's the protocol you were talking about, Elder Brother An. Junior Brother would of course never overlook such a matter. However..." He was only half-way finished speaking when suddenly, a booming sound erupted from the screen depicting the world from the Celestial Land.

When the booming sound appeared, it was obvious that it was coming from within the Celestial Land itself. The entire Celestial Land was shaking, and the nexus of it all was none other than Violet East Mountain. Immediately, all of the spectators looked over.

Even Ye Yuntian's words were immediately drowned out by the boom.

No one noticed, but Pill Demon's eyes suddenly emitted an unprecedented glow, and a smile slowly spread out across his face. It was a smile of satisfaction, filled with emotion and contentment.

Back in Meng Hao's world of illusion, he continued to reside in Eastern Emergence County. Three more years passed. Meng Hao was currently ninety-nine years old, and had once again returned to his Master's grave. He looked at the gravestone, and his face filled with emotion.

“Heaven and Earth are just resting places for the myriads of living creatures. Time represents the passage of hundreds of generations of passing travellers.” A smile broke out on Meng Hao’s face. Life is a journey, every turn of which is filled with new scenery. This path that he tread now contained his mark. Whether the mark was shallow or deep didn’t matter. That was because, it was his choice.

“Maybe my path hasn’t even arrived.” He shook his head. Perhaps in the future he would realize what his purpose in life was. For the moment, he still didn’t know. Since he didn’t know, he wouldn’t force himself to choose. When traveling, it is never possible to know what unfathomable things might occur. That is what makes it beautiful.

A carefree smile broke out on Meng Hao’s face. When it did, his white hair became black. His crooked frame straightened. His features were no longer ancient, but once again filled with the vigor of youth.

He took a deep breath, then looked at the gravestone and dropped to his knees to kowtow a third time!

The kowtow of Sunset Gazing!

With this kowtow, Karma was finalized, and the Master and apprentice relationship solidified. If you do not sever the bond, then neither shall I....

With this kowtow, Eastern Emergence County began to turn translucent behind Meng Hao, and then disappeared.

With this kowtow, the entire world around him began to disintegrate, leaving behind only the grave.

With this kowtow, a roaring sounded out between Heaven and Earth. Everything began to fall apart. Meng Hao... opened his eyes, and the world vanished. He saw the sky once again, the world of the Celestial Land. And there he stood on the peak of Violet East Mountain.

He looked off into the distance, and then took a step forward. As he did, ripples like that on the surface of water spread out. His body melted away. When he reappeared, he had left the world of the Celestial Land, and was now standing on Eastern Emergence Mountain, outside of the pill furnace.

His appearance garnered much attention, including a dark glare from Ye Feimu, and a cold smile from Ye Yuntian!

Everything was quiet for a moment, and then Ye Yuntian's cool voice echoed out.

"Just now I wasn't able to finish speaking. Elder Brother An, two people did step onto the peak of the mountain. However, when that happens, the resulting decision is not made by those two people, but rather, by you, me and the other Violet Furnace Lords, as well as all the Furnace Lords. We make the final decision. That is the protocol for the raising of a Violet Furnace Lord. Does this explanation suffice, Elder Brother An?" Ye Yuntian smiled. An Zaihai, on the other hand, said nothing. He merely flicked his sleeve.

"According to Sect protocol, because two people stepped foot on the peak of the mountain, it requires a decision to be made on our part. Whoever receives the most support will become the Violet Furnace Lord. I am Violet Furnace Lord Ye Yuntian. Please, will all Fellow Daoists of the Violet Fate Sect bear witness today? I believe that Ye Feimu is more qualified than Fang Mu. As such, I select Ye Feimu."

"Violet Furnace Lord Chen Xuyang selects Ye Feimu!"

"Violet Furnace Lord Shen Long selects Ye Feimu!"

"Violet Furnace Lord Yuan Daoming selects Ye Feimu!"

"Violet Furnace Lord Ma Feifeng selects Ye Feimu!"

In an instant, five Violet Furnace Lords had picked Ye Feimu as their choice. This caused Ye Feimu's expression to fill with pride and excitement.

Lin Hailong hesitated for a moment. He thought for a moment as he looked at Meng Hao, not making his decision immediately. The Violet Furnace Lord next to him was a middle-aged woman. Her expression was one of indifference, and she didn't speak immediately either.

The disciples from the other Sects watched as all of this happened. The sub-Patriarchs watched with vague smiles, not speaking.

Behind the Violet Furnace Lords were the Furnace Lords, who now began to speak.

“Furnace Lord He Jin selects Ye Feimu!”

“Furnace Lord Sun Zexuan selects Ye Feimu!”

As the voices rang out, it seemed that the greater part of half of them all selected Ye Feimu.

An Zaihai’s face was extremely unsightly. He was about to open his mouth to say something, when suddenly, Meng Hao’s voice calmly filled the air.

“Violet Furnace Lord Ye, I would like to ask a question,” he said. “Could you please explain exactly why I, Fang Mu, am not as qualified as Furnace Lord Ye?” His expression was as calm as always as he asked the question.

Ye Yuntian looked at him, and in a very impolite tone replied, “At the moment, it doesn’t matter whether we discuss your skill in the Dao of alchemy, or your reputation, or even your ability to create new medicinal pills. In my judgement, you are less qualified than Ye Feimu in all of these areas. Even more importantly, Ye Feimu became famous in the Southern Domain ten years ago. Half a year ago, he concocted a ninety percent consummate medicinal pill. He is destined to become a Violet Furnace Lord. As for you, you lack such qualifications!” His words sounded almost like a reprimand, and in fact, as a Violet Furnace Lord, he was qualified to say such things to a Furnace Lord.

“Qualifications?” replied Meng Hao, glancing at Ye Yuntian for a moment. Then he flung his sleeve out in front of him. A medicinal pill flew out. Then ten. Then one hundred. Then one thousand....

In an instant, more than a thousand medicinal pills flew out. Meng Hao swirled his sleeve, and they rolled through the air. Each medicinal pill was clearly marked with the symbol of a cauldron. That symbol was exactly like the mark which had been branded into the Bedevilment Pill!

When the pills appeared, the air was filled with an intense medicinal aroma like nothing anyone had ever encountered before. Every single pill

in this shocking display contained ninety percent medicinal strength. These were all ninety percent consummate pills!

These were all the highest value pills that Meng Hao had concocted after the Bedevilment Pill. He had concocted such pills often, in the hopes of finding an opportunity to sell them off one at a time. However today, he put them all on display, to shocking effect!

The medicinal pills floated in mid-air. The cauldron symbol instantly caused the minds of all of the alchemists to spin. Chu Yuyan immediately rose to her feet, an expression of disbelief on her face.

The minds of the disciples from the visiting Sects began to reel, even the sub-Patriarchs. Their eyes went wide and they stood up, their faces shining with shock.

The medicinal pills filled the air, and the medicinal aroma was as thick as fog, roiling out and filling the peak of Eastern Emergence Mountain. The grass in the earth struggled upward. Dark clouds filled the sky. Thunder crackled across the entire State of Eastern Emergence.

Even more surprising was that when Meng Hao tossed out the medicinal pills, they began to mass together in mid-air. Slowly, they formed together into the shape of an enormous cauldron, which gave rise to a resplendent glow that rose up with boundless radiance!

Meng Hao's cool voice rang out in all directions: "If you add in the fact that I'm Grandmaster Pill Cauldron, then would you say I'm qualified enough?"

Chapter 292: Pill Cauldron Fang Mu

Over a thousand medicinal pills swirled together to form a cauldron. Medicinal aroma filled the area. In an instant, everyone began to breathe heavily, shocked by the sight of the giant cauldron. Everything was quiet.

Lin Hailong shot to his feet, staring at Meng Hao, eyes glowing with unprecedented brightness.

Next to him, An Zaihai, who already knew the true identity of Grandmaster Pill Cauldron, couldn't help but be shocked by the sight of the cauldron formed from ninety percent consummate pills.

The other Violet Furnace Lords were gobsmacked. This many ninety percent consummate pills, all of them marked with a cauldron symbol, clearly indicated Meng Hao's identity. As of now, no one would be stupid enough to deny that he was Pill Cauldron.

If he wasn't Pill Cauldron, how could he possibly have so many ninety percent consummate pills?

If he wasn't Pill Cauldron, then how could he have shockingly created something out of nothing within the third region?

Thinking of everything that had happened, and then being faced with the pill cauldron floating in mid-air, everyone could clearly see that the famous Grandmaster Pill Cauldron was none other than Fang Mu.

Ye Yuntian's face was pale white as he staggered back a few paces, panting. His eyes overflowed with disbelief. He knew that Ye Feimu wasn't Grandmaster Pill Cauldron, but no matter how he'd thought things through, he'd never anticipated that Fang Mu could possibly be the owner of that mysterious identity. In fact, he had harbored other speculations regarding the identity of Grandmaster Pill Cauldron, and was dogged in his conclusions. But now, everything had been turned around. Ye Yuntian's mind spun!

The name of Grandmaster Pill Cauldron resounded throughout the entire Southern Domain, to such an extent that he was included among

the other three Grandmasters. In fact, many people believed that Grandmaster Pill Cauldron really was the fourth Grandmaster of the Southern Domain.

Such an identity, such knowledge, were like a shocking, resounding slap across Ye Yuntian's face, stinging, burning, causing his mind to buzz.

He thought about what he had just said, and the question Fang Mu had asked him regarding qualifications. Now, the words he had said... made his face burn even hotter. He was so ashamed he felt like finding a hole to crawl into.

If Grandmaster Pill Cauldron wasn't qualified to be a Violet Furnace Lord, then who in the world was? Were the current eight Violet Furnace Lords even qualified...?

Ye Feimu's body shook, and his face was devoid of any trace of blood. He looked as gray as death as he stared mutely at Meng Hao and the giant pill cauldron floating in the air. His mind was blank, as if he had completely lost the ability to even think.

He had known all along that he wasn't the mysterious Pill Cauldron. As more and more people speculated that he was, he had always felt as if he should tell the truth, but instead maintained his silence.

He needed that identity to help propel him into being a Violet Furnace Lord. Therefore, when Chu Yuyan came asking about it, he said nothing, and thus, gave implicit approval.

In truth, he held deep admiration in his heart for Grandmaster Pill Cauldron. As such, he had always felt twisted inside about the matter.

Now, he was stunned to learn that Fang Mu was the mysterious Grandmaster Pill Cauldron, which made his mind go completely blank.

Chu Yuyan trembled and her mind spun. This development was just simply impossible for her to accept. Her mental image of Grandmaster Pill Cauldron, and Fang Mu's appearance, had never once overlapped in her mind. In fact, she had believed Ye Feimu to be Grandmaster Pill Cauldron.

But now, facing the pill cauldron of medicinal pills, seeing Meng Hao's

tranquility and calmness, and hearing his words echo in her ears, her face filled with blankness and disbelief.

She couldn't understand how the Fang Mu who had irritated her from the first day she saw him years ago, was actually Pill Cauldron, who she secretly esteemed so much. There was no way for Chu Yuyan to accept this; she could only stare awkwardly.

Now, the expressions of all of the Furnace Lords who had supported Ye Feimu changed, filling with disbelief. Grandmaster Pill Cauldron was much more important than their ordinary relationship with Ye Feimu.

Supporting Ye Feimu was nothing like supporting Grandmaster Pill Cauldron. In the hearts of the master alchemists of the East Pill Division, Grandmaster Pill Cauldron occupied a revered place similar to that of Pill Demon.

Therefore, though they had supported Ye Feimu, things had now changed in an instant. Now that Fang Mu's identity was revealed, his words echoed in the air like a shocking clap of thunder, resonating into the minds of the Furnace Lords to the point of detonation.

All of the Furnace Lords stared mutely, breathing heavily, their faces filled with acute astonishment.

No one spoke, but their minds all buzzed with similar thoughts.

"So Furnace Lord Fang Mu is the real Grandmaster Pill Cauldron...."

"So many ninety percent consummate pills. Only Grandmaster Pill Cauldron could concoct so many. Fang Mu... really is Grandmaster Pill Cauldron!!"

In addition to the members of the East Pill Division, the Cultivators from the outside Sects all had expressions of incredulity on their faces.

Patriarch Violet Sieve from the Black Sieve Sect stared in shock. Suddenly, he thought back to when Fang Mu had concocted pills for them back in the Sect, and then he realized why they had been so effective. Fang Mu was no ordinary Furnace Lord, he was... Grandmaster Pill Cauldron!

Han Bei's narrow mouth was opened wide, as if she couldn't breathe. She stared dully at Meng Hao; Grandmaster Pill Cauldron's reputation was just too great. It resounded like thunder in her ears! And now it turned out that all along, Fang Mu was Grandmaster Pill Cauldron!

Fatty was panting, and his expression was one of intense admiration.

As for Chen Fan, Li Daoyi and Li Shiqi, as well as all the other disciples from the visiting Sects, they simply stared, their minds shaking because of the revelation of Fang Mu's identity.

Even the sub-Patriarchs were staring thoughtfully, their eyes shining with strange expressions. They could very well imagine how after this day, the name of Grandmaster Pill Cauldron would thoroughly fill the entire Southern Domain.

When that happened, Fang Mu... might not be like the sun in the sky above the Southern Domain, but he would certainly be nearly as illustrious!

"Violet Furnace Lord Ye," said Meng Hao coolly, staring the pale-faced Ye Yuntian straight in the eye, "is my status high enough?"

Ye Yuntian wanted to say something, but considering that Fang Mu was Grandmaster Pill Cauldron, all the words became stuck in his throat. How could he have the face to say anything?

"I support Furnace Lord Fang Mu!" An Zaihai said suddenly. Next to him, Lin Hailong did not hesitate for a moment. He immediately repeated An Zaihai's words. After that was the middle-aged woman. Next, all of the Violet Furnace Lords who had supported Ye Feimu sighed in their hearts, and then voiced their support for Fang Mu.

After that, were the Furnace Lords. Roughly ninety percent of the nearly one hundred Furnace Lords all echoed words of support.

"I support Grandmaster Pill Cauldron!"

"I support Furnace Lord Fang Mu!"

Their voices echoed out, layer upon layer, transforming into a cacophony

that filled the air.

Chapter 293: Legacy Apprentice

Ye Feimu smiled sadly as he looked at Meng Hao. The sense of loss within his heart had reached the ultimate level. In order to fulfill his desire to become a Violet Furnace Lord, he had neglected his cultivation, and had spent all of his time stubbornly pursuing the Dao of alchemy.

He had always believed that with enough persistence, his skill in the Dao of alchemy would assure his place as a Violet Furnace Lord. Ye Yuntian had given him this affirmation; even some of the other Violet Furnace Lords had approved.

“Why... why did he have to show up...? Why does the Violet Fate Sect’s East Pill Division have to have Ye Feimu AND Fang Mu...?” With a bitter laugh, he staggered backward and coughed up a mouthful of blood.

It wasn’t that he was unconvinced; the instant he learned that Fang Mu was Grandmaster Pill Cauldron, he knew it all to be correct. He couldn’t blame others for supporting Fang Mu. He could only laugh, and bitterly at that.

He proudly told himself that if it wasn’t for his opponent’s strength, and the fact that he was Grandmaster Pill Cauldron, then Ye Feimu, who was at the peak of the East Pill Division Furnace Lords, would be second to none. He would definitely have succeeded, and taken first place in the Violet Furnace Lord promotion trial by fire.

Now, however, he was defeated. He could even imagine the scorn with which people would look at him later in the Sect. It would not be scorn regarding his Dao of alchemy, but scorn because of his tacit implication that he was Grandmaster Pill Cauldron.

Therefore, he could only laugh bitterly, utterly disheartened.

Blood seeped out of the corners of his mouth. “My Dao of alchemy, can’t be defeated.... One loss, I can accept, or even two, but repeated failure... will destroy my Dao of alchemy. No. What has been defeated is not my Dao of Alchemy, but myself!” He wiped the blood from his mouth, and his eyes once again shone with determination. “My Dao of alchemy will never

be defeated. It is unprecedented, one of a kind, original in Heaven and Earth! This is my great Dao of alchemy!” His breathing was ragged as he looked over at Meng Hao.

Chu Yuyan said nothing. She gradually suppressed the trembling of her mind as she stared at Meng Hao. An unparalleled bitterness rose up in her heart. She had long since been defeated. She realized that from the moment she had stepped into the world of the Celestial Land... she had lost.

If Fang Mu had not been there, nor Ye Feimu, then she definitely would have become a Violet Furnace Lord. She still wanted to prove herself, but as of now, there was no chance.

In the Violet Furnace Lord trial by fire, only one alchemist could become a Violet Furnace Lord.

Miss this one opportunity, and no matter what stunning achievements you made later, you could only live with regret. There would never be a second chance at the trial by fire.

“Just like my Dao of alchemy, which seeks to find that missing spark of life. Today, that spark of life has completely vanished, and there is no way to find it again. Just like my Dao of alchemy....” Within her bitterness, blood seeped out of the corners of her mouth. The pain she felt inside was because of the Dao of alchemy.

Everyone was silent. Ye Yuntian looked agonized, incapable of saying anything further. He felt stabbing pains in his heart, and he could only think that Ye Feimu’s path was now over. His future was nothing more than a grave.

The surrounding Cultivators observed the scene with various thoughts in mind. They all had their own concept regarding the path of the Dao of alchemy; this was because everyone had a different concept of what stubbornness meant. Everyone had their own path.

It was not easy to compare such things. After all, what was defeated was not just an individual, but a Dao of alchemy. Because endurance became impossible, collapse was inevitable.

As silence filled the area, a light sigh could suddenly be heard, seemingly from very far away. Grandmaster Pill demon slowly rose to his feet. His gaze swept over the alchemists. Everyone whose gaze he met slowly lowered their heads, their faces filled with respect.

Eventually, his eyes came to rest on Ye Feimu.

“The Dao of alchemy is invincible,” he said. “Even more invincible, is the determination to cultivate the Dao of alchemy. If that determination exists, then even after ten thousand defeats, your Dao of alchemy will always be there. You have done well. Ever since you joined the Sect, you have consistently pursued your own path.

“Your path is winding, and full of thorns and thistles, making it slow to traverse. Only with never-ending determination can you have the courage to face defeat, and yet proceed onward to reach your goal. Walk such a path, and your path will be invincible. Fear not defeat. Fear giving up!”

Ye Feimu’s body trembled as he stared blankly at Pill Demon. Silently, he clasped hands and bowed deeply. “Many thanks for your enlightenment, Patriarch.”

“You may be a Violet Furnace Lord,” said Pill Demon coolly. “From this day forth, you are my novitiate.”

Ye Feimu trembled, and his face filled with excitement. This was his dream, finally becoming a reality. The path had been winding, but to become a Violet Furnace Lord had been the most important pursuit in his life for many years.

The minds of the surrounding alchemists of the East Pill Division were reeling as they watched. None of them knew what to say as Pill Demon’s gaze next fell upon Chu Yuyan.

“You have searched for a Dao of alchemy that embraces life, life like that which we live. You wish to find that spark of life which doesn’t exist. It is exceedingly hard to reach the peak of such a Dao of alchemy. It is not a winding path, but a very difficult one.

“In fact, sometimes, there is no spark of life. When that happens, what

will you do? The path of your Dao of alchemy lies not in pill concoction, but in refinement of the heart. You have always been my apprentice. But unlike the others, you are my Personal Apprentice. You... also may become a Violet Furnace Lord.” As Pill Demon’s voice sounded out, tears began to stream down Chu Yuyan’s face. She immediately bowed low to Pill Demon.

Each and every one of the alchemists of the East Pill Division was speechless. Only the Violet Furnace Lords seemed to want to speak up, but held their tongues.

Lin Hailong hesitated a moment. He was the most senior of the Violet Furnace Lords. Bracing himself, he opened his mouth. “Master, according to the custom of the trial by fire for promotion to Violet Furnace Lord, only one person can be selected....”

“Ever since Eternal Mountain left, you have made no progress in your Dao of Alchemy. You haven’t moved at all since that year. Do you know why?” Pill Demon calmly looked over at Lin Hailong. “I haven’t told you all these years, because I wanted you to realize it for yourself. But you still don’t understand. Is custom... really that important?”

Feeling a bit awkward, Lin Hailong forced a smile onto his face and said, “But... the custom was begun by you, Master.”

“Since I began the custom, then naturally I can change it. Let it be so!” He flicked his sleeve, paying no further attention to Lin Hailong and turning to look at Meng Hao.

Lin Hailong heaved a sigh of relief in his heart and immediately stepped backward. Actually, he only spoke because there were outsiders present to observe the ceremonies. Being the most senior of the Violet Furnace Lords, he was required to least say at least something, even if it was in a roundabout way.

Pill Demon looked at Meng Hao. “Using the body as the pill furnace, and the heart as the pill formula. Refining the sun and the moon, refining the ancientness of the stars. Such a Dao of alchemy....” He paused for a moment. “Master looks forward to finding out where your future path will

lead.” A smile broke out on his face.

As he spoke, the onlookers could tell that there was something different about his words. This was because, Pill Demon was calling himself Master!

“Violet Furnace Lords become my novitiates, and thus only need to kowtow one time. Since you are Pill Cauldron you can become my Personal Apprentice with two kowtows.

“However... I already accepted a hefty apprentice’s fee from you, so from today on, I will have a second Legacy Apprentice. Now, kowtow before me three times!” As he smiled at Meng Hao, the kindness in his eyes overlapped with those of the Master from Meng Hao’s world of illusion.

Meng Hao had a strange expression on his face. The words “apprentice’s fee” suddenly made him recall his 200,000,000 Spirit Stones....

Before he could say anything, though, Pill Demon raised his right hand and flicked his sleeve. Immediately, ripples appeared in the air, surrounding Meng Hao and then disappearing into his body.

“Hailong,” said Pill Demon. “Please assist Master in receiving all the friends from the other Sects. Announce to all the Southern Domain that I have accepted Fang Mu as my Legacy Apprentice!”

As his words filled the air, everyone stood up and clasped hands toward the Heavens. Lin Hailong trembled inwardly when he heard the words, and his vision came to rest on Meng Hao. The other Violet Furnace Lords were the same. They all knew what a Legacy Apprentice was.

Envy shone in Han Bei’s eyes. She knew that from this day forward, Fang Mu would be different than anyone else in the Southern Domain.

Fatty sighed inwardly, reminding himself how the oldest brother was the most awesome. This time, he had worked his way into being Pill Demon’s Legacy Apprentice.

When it comes to apprentices, there are three levels, novitiate, Personal Apprentice and Legacy Apprentice.

Novitiates only receive simple advice, although they are permitted to ask

questions. Personal Apprentices follow the Master by his side. They receive instruction verbally and by example. Personal skills are passed down, including some secret techniques.

Legacy Apprentices are the most important of all. They receive a lifetime of knowledge; they are the hope for the future, the hope to pass on everything. Nothing will be held back from such an apprentice. Such an apprentice is even more important than a son!

In the deepest corner of the Violet Fate Sect, within the East Pill Division, is a squat mountain. The mountains which surround it are much higher than it; however, this mountain seemed to be embodied with a profound air of dignity, as if it were the most senior of all the mountains.

This mountain was actually the pinnacle of all the mountains of the East Pill Division!

Located on this peak of mountains was a building, which Pill Demon led Meng Hao to. The instant Meng Hao saw it, he gaped. The building looked exactly like his Master's house from the world of illusion.

Pill Demon pushed the doorway open and walked inside, back facing Meng Hao. As he walked, he explained, "You experienced the kowtow of Innocence. You walked the kowtow of Roaming. In the end, you chose to perform the kowtow of Sunset Gazing. With these three kowtows, you took me as your Master."

Meng Hao followed, watching the old man's back as he walked along. Suddenly, he realized that this man didn't seem like a stranger at all. The life he had lived in the world of illusions was overlapping with reality. Meng Hao suddenly clasped hands and bowed deeply toward Pill Demon.

"Apprentice greets Master," he said.

"In the Celestial Land, Master told you that you would only need to perform two kowtows. The first kowtow was broken up into three parts. Master has sown Karma, and because you did not break it, neither shall I! As for the second kowtow, I didn't explain it back then.

“Now the time has come for you to understand. The second kowtow will come if the day ever arrives in which I return to the dust. Then you must kowtow to break our Karma, so that our fates are no longer intertwined. I will give you a lifetime of favor as your Master; all you must give me, is the ability to smile before I die. That smile will be because I know that my legacy from this life will be passed on.

“If in the course of being my apprentice you choose the same path as my first Legacy Apprentice, Liu Rufeng, and leave me, then there will be no need for the second kowtow.

“Your feet belong to you, and the path lays beneath your feet. The choice will be yours to make in the future.” Pill Demon suddenly turned to look at Meng Hao.

“However,” he continued slowly, “if I were to tell you that I am unable to dispel the poison of the Resurrection Lily, would you still be willing to take me as your Master?”

Chapter 294: Complete Legacy!

Meng Hao looked at his Master silently for a moment. Then, he quietly said, “At first, I came because I wanted to get rid of the poison. After I joined the Sect, I stayed because of the Dao of alchemy!”

Pill Demon gazed at Meng Hao for a long moment. Finally, a look of contentment appeared on his face, and he smiled.

Slowly, he said, “From your first day in the Sect, Master felt the Qi of the Resurrection Lily. Later, when I saw you, I understood the situation. There are three ways that you can dispel the poison. One is for it to merge with you, after which, you will no longer be you. The second is for you to devour it, then it won’t be it!

“As for the third... it is to use your own Dao of alchemy to dispel the poison yourself. Karma exists within Heaven and Earth. The Resurrection Lily in your body is the cause of the Karma. Other than you, no one else can dispel it. The reason is because no one else is you. The fact that no one else can dispel the poison but you, is the result of the Karma.

“On this path, the first is the passive, the second is the active, and the third is the most active method, that of using your Dao of alchemy. I presume you understand the meaning of my words.”

Meng Hao was silent. The poison had been within him since the State of Zhao, pestering him all the way until now. He had been unable to dispel it for that entire time. When he first joined the Violet Fate Sect, he’d had no understanding of the Dao of alchemy. However, thanks to his constant cultivation, he had gained more enlightenment regarding the poison, as well as some bit of hope. Hearing Master’s words now, though, caused him to sigh in his heart.

“This poison is nothing,” said Pill Demon. “With your skill in the Dao of alchemy, you’ll be able to dispel it sooner or later. Master can see that the Resurrection Lily has somehow been suppressed. Strange. Right now it’s as if it’s asleep. However, the power of suppression seems to be gradually weakening....”

Meng Hao's eyes glittered. Calmly, he said, "Master, if I must dispel the poison myself, then, can I ask, in your experience, have you ever known someone else to successfully do so in the past?"

"One person," replied Pill Demon. "He lived by the Milky Way Sea, and his name was Reverend Silver Lamp. His Cultivation base was unfathomable. He came to me seven hundred years ago, looking for a method to dispel his poison. I said the same thing to him that I told you. Three hundred years later he returned to me to repay my kindness. He had successfully dispelled the poison."

Meng Hao was thoughtful for a moment, then gave a slight smile. "If that person could dispel the poison, then I will definitely be able to use my Dao of alchemy to do the same."

His voice low, expression somber, Pill Demon continued, "If Master forcefully assisted you in dispelling the poison, it would harm the cycle of Karma. That would not benefit you at all. However, under my tutelage, your Dao of alchemy will eventually reach the point where you can dispel it yourself! The poison of the Resurrection Lily gave you the power of nature talent. If in the future you dispel the poison, then you will be able to assimilate its full power. In that case, you can turn one of the most ultimate poisons under Heaven, into a rarely seen treasure!

"Such a treasure will enable you to open up your path to the Heavens. Having this poison within you might seem like a disaster, but one aspect of the disaster is unprecedented luck!" He suddenly changed the subject. "After the three kowtows, you became my Legacy Apprentice. Therefore, Master has three gifts for you." He raised his arm and flicked his wide sleeve. Immediately, everything around them swirled into a riot of colors.

"The first gift is a batch of Outlander Pills. The name comes from the expression 'a night of outlandish tales.' A pill such as this has never before appeared in the Southern Domain. I created it during alchemic enlightenment three years ago.

"This batch contains three pills in total. Consuming one pill will cause the Resurrection Lily to slumber for one hundred years, will increase your

longevity by one hundred years, and will allow you to make progress in your Cultivation base; if you face any sort of blockage, it can help you to break through. These three pills will help you, my apprentice, to reach the Nascent Soul stage with no problems!

“In total, it will also give you three hundred years of extra time to dispel your poison. If you have not succeeded after three hundred years, then I will concoct another batch of pills for you, and will continue to do so until the day you dispel the poison.”

The words entered Meng Hao’s ears and sank all the way to his heart. He looked at his Master, and could feel the sincerity in his words, as well as a kindness and love.

Three years ago, Grandmaster Pill Demon had concocted pills during alchemic enlightenment, just for him. Meng Hao clasped hands and bowed deeply.

“Many thanks, Master!”

“Master’s second gift for you is a legacy technique of the East Pill Division. The name is Spirit Summoning Incantation. It can be used to refine a pill up to six times, although, with sufficient latent talent and Cultivation base, the limit of six can be broken! Again, this is a legacy technique of the East Pill Division. To date, I have only ever passed it on to two people. You, and your former Elder Brother Liu Rufeng.” With that, Pill Demon reached up and pushed down onto Meng Hao’s forehead.

Instantly, Meng Hao’s body trembled, and an icy coldness swept through him. A long passage of text appeared in his mind; it seemed abstruse and profound, but after scanning over it, Meng Hao seemed to have gained complete enlightenment.

“This is a legacy technique which may not be passed on to anyone other than a Legacy Apprentice. There is no complicated process to understand how to employ it; as long as you master the fundamentals, you can use it. Later, you must pass it on to another, and so it will go from generation to generation.” A profound look gleamed in Pill Demon’s eyes.

“The last of my three gifts is a precious treasured item of the East Pill

Division. The East Pill Everburning Flame!” He flicked his right sleeve again, and the mountainside split open. A rumbling sound filled the air as a massive fissure appeared.

Within was a flight of steps that seemed to descend down into the depths of the earth. Pill Demon and Meng Hao, Master and apprentice, walked downward. They walked for a very, very long time.

Eventually, they were deep down in the earth beneath the Violet Fate Sect. Meng Hao’s mind trembled as he looked ahead. In front of him was an enormous limestone cavern.

Within the cavern were three enormous, half-burned black joss sticks. Strands of black smoke emanated up from them to swirl and float about. In addition to the smoke floating around the cavern, greenish flames also burned everywhere.

Above the three joss sticks floated a black pill furnace, approximately three meters tall. It seemed as if it were being supported by the smoke and fueled by the flames.

Pill Demon looked at the pill furnace, and his eyes shone as if he were recalling some memory. It was a complicated expression which lasted for only a moment before he sighed lightly.

“This incense is not of this world. The smoke never disperses and the incense never ceases burning; this is the East Pill Division’s Everburning Flame! It has been burning for more than twenty thousand years.... It is a legacy which cannot be extinguished. Instill it into your heart, and it can become an alchemic flame!

“After you reach Core Formation, fuse this flame into your Violet Core, and it will ignite. Thereafter, whenever you concoct medicinal pills, you will not need to use Earthly fire. This is your personal alchemic fire, with which you can refine all objects in Heaven and Earth. In the entire East Pill Division, only you and I are qualified to use this legacy fire.

“The Everburning flame is always here, as am I.” This last line was uttered by Pill Demon in a murmur, making it difficult for Meng Hao to hear clearly. As he spoke, Pill Demon was staring at the joss sticks, the

smoke and the flame, and it seemed as if he wasn't even speaking to Meng Hao.

After a moment, he looked toward Meng Hao. "You will stay here in secluded meditation. When you have assimilated the will of the fire into your heart, then you may emerge." With that, he turned and slowly strode up the stairs, eventually disappearing.

Meng Hao thought about everything for a long time, then sat down cross-legged. He looked down at the pill bottle in his hand. Inside were the Outlander Pills Master had concocted for him. Meng Hao could hardly imagine how precious the pills were.

He put the pill bottle into his bag of holding, and then closed his eyes. Within his mind floated the Spirit Summoning Incantation. Within were techniques to refine a pill three, four even six times. By using this technique on an ordinary pill, it was possible to transform it into a consummate pill.

The power of such a technique caused Meng Hao's mind to shake. This was a divine ability of the Dao of alchemy, congruous in cultivation terms to the Sublime Spirit Scripture!

You could say that with this pill concocting technique, Meng Hao truly was a sort of Grandmaster in the field of pill concoction. Skill in this technique was not something that anyone could cultivate. Starting with the fourth refinement, any flame other than the East Pill Division's Everburning Flame would not be sufficient to employ the technique.

In the entire East Pill Division, only Pill Demon and Meng Hao could use the Everburning Flame and employ the fourth refinement. Only they were qualified.

Meng Hao took a deep breath as he opened his eyes. Now he understood why Master had instructed him to stay here and gather the East Pill Everburning Flame into the depths of his heart.

"This is a complete legacy," he thought, looking at the joss sticks, the smoke, and the greenish inextinguishable flames. "The flame and the technique complement each other. Without one or the other, it would be

impossible to reach the pinnacle....”

Time passed by. In the blink of an eye, three months had passed. During those three months, Meng Hao never left the limestone cavern. However, the promotion of three Violet Furnace Lords had caused a shocking commotion throughout the Southern Domain.

Many people were saying that this was the most incredible Violet Furnace Lord promotion trial by fire that had occurred within the past ten!

Thanks to word being spread by other Sects, Chu Yuyan’s Dao of alchemy, as well as her skill in pill concocting, became the talk of the Southern Domain. It was said that she fully deserved to become a Violet Furnace Lord.

Her name spread throughout the great Sects, as did the expression ‘Violet Furnace Lord Chu Yuyan.’

Above her, and causing even more of a stir, was of course Ye Feimu. He was stunning to the extreme, as was the potency and invincibility of his Dao of alchemy. He concocted one pill to create ten thousand stairs up the mountain. The stories spread until everyone in the Southern Domain had heard of him.

Considering he had already garnered impressive fame in the past, now that he had become a Violet Furnace Lord, his name was thoroughly prominent. In fact, he could be considered a pillar of the Violet Fate Sect.

Most shocking all, was none other than Fang Mu!

He was Grandmaster Pill Cauldron, Legacy Apprentice of Grandmaster Pill Demon. He had risen to prominence in the western region of the Southern Domain, where he had slain a Black Lands Core Formation Cultivator. All of this caused Fang Mu to instantly become the most talked about person in all of the Southern Domain.

More and more people viewed him as the fourth Grandmaster of the Southern Domain.

Word spread of how atop the peak of Eastern Emergence Mountain he had formed the enormous pill cauldron of a thousand medicinal pills.

When people heard the story, their blood boiled, causing even more people to talk about how he was the fourth Grandmaster.

In the Violet Fate Sect's East Pill Division, the honorable Fang Mu was second only to Grandmaster Pill Demon. All of the Cultivators in the East Pill Division recognized this.

Many people took Meng Hao to be the Dao Child of the East Pill Division, equal even to the Dao Child of the Sect itself, or perhaps even a bit higher in reputation.

It was at this time that a great change occurred to the corpse which had fallen from the sky to land in the Southern Domain all those years ago. Magical symbols appeared on its skin, then floated out into the air, creating refracted reflections of themselves. There were some who recognized what this text was. It was one of the three classic scriptures... the Dao Divinity Scripture!

The Sublime Spirit Scripture, the Dao Divinity Scripture and the Heaven Severing Scripture. Three classic scriptures, each one capable of arousing terrifying waves of peril. Even people from the Western Desert and the Eastern Lands employed various shocking methods and powers to teleport to the Southern Domain because of it.

Furthermore, upon the appearance of the scripture, the force preventing people from nearing the corpse suddenly vanished. The corpse, which was as large as a mountain, was now approachable.

The Solitary Sword Sect paid quite a price to acquire a hair from the corpse's head. According to the rumors, they refined the hair into a precious treasure which could shock Heaven and Earth!

Grandmaster Eternal Mountain from the Golden Frost Sect employed all the power of the Sect to acquire a blood sample from the corpse. Supposedly, the pill he concocted with it was almost a Celestial Pill!

As word spread of the various events, the Southern Domain was thrown into a thorough commotion. More and more Sects and Clans dispatched forces to the Immortal's Corpse.

At the same time, an increasing volume of shrill calls could be heard from within the Rebirth Cave. Soon, they turned into sustained roars. Furthermore, a black wind emerged from within the cave to sweep around the area surrounding the corpse.

Throughout the years, countless Cultivators who were nearing death had entered the Rebirth Cave, hoping to be reborn. As to whether those people were alive or dead, no one was sure. But based on the resulting legends and stories, the Rebirth Cave had slowly come to be just like the Ancient Temple of Doom; one of the three Danger Zones!

After more than ten years had passed during which the corpse was under investigation, the bizarre life force within the cave was finally on the move, and revealing its avaricious will.

Figurative storm clouds roiled over the Southern Domain.

Chapter 295: Green Mark

As more news spread about the Immortal's corpse, the Violet Fate Sect gradually began to pay closer attention to the matter. The first to be dispatched were some Chosen from the Violet Qi Division, along with a Sect Elder. It was around the same time that other of the great Sects and Clans also sent their forces there.

At the same time, more and more Southern Domain Cultivators gathered in the region of the Rebirth Cave, hoping to eke out some luck there.

The momentous events in the Southern Domain went so far as to attract the attention of the Western Desert. Actually, years ago, when the corpse had just fallen from the sky, Western Desert Cultivators had arrived to investigate. Because of the new rumors spreading about the corpse, large amounts of Western Desert Cultivators once again appeared.

Even the Eastern Lands viewed the developments with importance and sent Cultivators.

Eventually, the Cultivators gathering around the Rebirth Cave and the Immortal's corpse found out something very bizarre. The Cultivation base of any Nascent Soul Cultivator who approached the corpse would be severely suppressed. If they continued to push forward, it would eventually be pushed down to the Core Formation stage.

Core Formation Cultivators, on the other hand, experienced no hindrances whatsoever.

Even more bizarre was that any Cultivator who touched the corpse, which resembled something like a small mountain, would immediately disappear, teleported away. Most would be teleported back into the area a short while later.

When recounting their experience, everyone described things differently.

One person saw a river, another saw buildings, palaces and temples. One caught sight of precious treasures, but was unable to acquire them.

Another described seeing Celestial Pills, and one person, pill formulas carved onto stone walls. Even more far-fetched was someone who claimed to have seen a battlefield, deep in the middle of which was a coffin!

There were all sorts of descriptions, none exactly alike.

All of this made the Immortal's corpse even more fantastic, and caused it to attract even more people to come investigate.

In a period of a few months, the Violet Fate Sect had already dispatched five groups of people. Starting with the fourth group, it wasn't just the Violet Qi Division who went, but also alchemists from the East Pill Division.

This was because the Cultivator who had seen pill formulas was none other than a Violet Qi Division disciple. After returning and telling his tale, it only took a few days for the East Pill Division to include alchemists with the fourth group dispatched.

The leaders of this particular group was none other than Ye Feimu, An Zaihai and Ye Yuntian.

Three Violet Furnace Lords emerged simultaneously, along with experts from the Violet Qi Division. This was the fourth wave sent to enter the region of the Immortal's corpse.

A month passed, and more bizarre events occurred. The various Sects and Clans continued to dispatch more people, now, even eccentrics of the Patriarch level appeared.

It was at this time that the Violet Fate Sect began organizing the fifth group of people to travel to the Rebirth Cave.

By this time, Meng Hao had been in secluded meditation for half a year. It was three days after the fifth group left, led by Chu Yuyan and Lin Hailong, that he finally emerged.

When he walked out from the subterranean cavern, his body was somewhat weak. However, his eyes were filled with profundity much deeper than before. There was no evidence on him that he possessed the Everburning Flame. However, if you looked deep into his eyes, you

couldn't help but think that there was some massive conflagration deep therein.

Meng Hao had already melded the East Pill Everburning Flame into his mind and heart. Once he broke through from Foundation Establishment and formed a Violet Core, then he could transform it, and cause the Everburning Flame to ignite, and never be extinguished!

After emerging from meditation, Meng Hao could immediately sense the storm winds which flitted about the Sect. After some inquiries, he learned about the phenomena regarding the Immortal's corpse which had begun half a year previous.

Meng Hao actually knew much more about the Immortal's corpse than most others. On more than one occasion, he had gotten the feeling that the corpse had fallen into the world... because it was searching for him.

This speculation caused him to hesitate, and hold back from nearing the thing.

Hearing the various stories regarding the corpse caused Meng Hao to think about the matter quietly for a while. Then, he went to pay a formal visit to his Master. Afterward, he decided to once again go into secluded meditation, this time, to concoct a Three Mortalities Pill and break through to Core Formation.

At the moment, Meng Hao was thoroughly within the great circle of Foundation Establishment. The only road for him now was the one leading to becoming a Core Formation Expert.

After that, he could cultivate Core Qi, and then he could truly rise to prominence. Then, even Core Formation Cultivators would have to be careful around him. Many new paths would open up.

You could say becoming a Core Formation expert is truly becoming a Cultivator!

The breathing exercises that Cultivators practice are actually a way of preparing for the path of Core Formation, and counts as just the beginning. During Foundation Establishment, a foundation is laid; the

more solid it is, the more powerful the result will be in Core Formation. In fact, Core Formation... is the first true explosive power upon the path of cultivation.

Core Formation Cultivators can use Core Qi to make magical techniques reach the pinnacle of power. Beyond that pinnacle, such techniques become divine abilities. Divine abilities are techniques that really only Nascent Soul Cultivators can master.

“Charge through to Core Formation!” thought Meng Hao. His eyes gleamed with stubbornness as he sat cross-legged in his Immortal’s Cave. He waved his right sleeve, and a black pill furnace materialized. As soon as it did, the face of a youth appeared on its surface. It stared hatefully at Meng Hao, its eyes filled with venomous hatred as it screamed a noiseless scream.

It was still filled with rage because Meng Hao had taken it out from the world of the Mother of Furnaces.

Meng Hao eyed the materialized youth on the surface of the black pill furnace. Then, he snorted coldly. The spirit of the pill furnace was unable to tell the difference between good and bad. Whenever Meng Hao used it to concoct pills, it was always filled with resentment.

“Since it seems you are seeking to die, I’ll help you to understand what it means to live a life worse than death. It won’t be long before you’re pleading with me to help you.” With that, he grabbed the black pill furnace, and, ignoring the fierce struggling on the face of the youth, as well as the noiseless screaming, he directly placed it into the blood-colored mask.

“Elder Ultimate Vexation, this is the spirit I spoke of a while ago. I joined this Sect just to capture this bully. May I prevail upon you to convert it?”

The meat jelly was currently perched atop a listless, ingratiating Li Clan Patriarch, leaning over and looking down at him. When it heard Meng Hao’s words, it began to tremble, and its eyes shone with a brilliant light. Filled with excitement, it immediately looked at the black pill furnace which Meng Hao had delivered to it.

“Fear not,” said the meat jelly with a smile. “You may be immoral, you may be incorrect, but you can rest at ease. The great, handsome, kind-hearted Ultimate Vexation will help bring you back from the path of wickedness!” It hopped over next to the black pill furnace....

Meng Hao retracted his Spiritual Sense, ignoring the spirit of the furnace. Instead, he pulled out the Ten Thousand Refinements furnace and some medicinal herbs. After a moment's thought, he devoted himself fully to pill concoction.

He would concoct the Three Mortalities Pill, which was required to be able to break through from Foundation Establishment to Core Formation.

The diligence with which Meng Hao focused on concocting the medicinal pill he needed for his breakthrough does not need to be described in detail. He took a full half a month, which, considering it didn't involve alchemic enlightenment, was actually quite a long time for him, something that didn't happen very often.

Half a month later, he looked down at the Three Mortalities Pill in his palm, and took a deep breath. Then, he started to duplicate it. Early in the morning of the next day, Meng Hao unhesitatingly consumed a Three Mortalities Pill and began to circulate the power of Violet Qi from the East in an attempt to form a Violet Core.

Days passed. Meng Hao lost track of how many Three Mortalities Pills he consumed. He had never imagined that using the ten Dao Pillars of the Perfect Foundation to form a Violet Core would be such a difficult process.

A month went by, and Meng Hao was completely immersed in using the Three Mortalities Pill to reach Core Formation. However, after a month of attempts, he had not succeeded. He was only a bit away, but no matter what he did, the only thing he could do was produce violet Qi. Every time he tried to form it into a Core, he failed.

Failure after failure caused Meng Hao to begin to regret having borrowed such a vast amount of Spirit Stones from the Sect after becoming a Violet Furnace Lord. Watching them flow away like water caused him intense pain. However, there was nothing he could do about it.

“Based on this rate of success, could my chances of success with ten Dao Pillars really be one in a thousand?” Meng Hao sighed. That thought was quite frightening. Without the copper mirror, his Cultivation base would never be able to progress beyond Foundation Establishment.

He sat thinking for a while, his brow furrowed, considering Li Daoyi and the others, and their breakthrough at the Dao Geyser.

“It must have something to do with my ten Dao Pillars,” sighed Meng Hao. He didn’t completely give up; based on his speculation just now, even if he only had a one in a thousand chance, that meant there was still hope.

“The first step is to form a Violet Core. Then after I concoct the Perfect Gold Core pill, I can form a Gold Core. For me, the Core Formation stage will involve a huge jump in power. Once I’m at Core Formation, I can wear the blood-colored mask and employ the Blood Immortal’s divine abilities! Also, according to what the meat jelly said, after I reach Core Formation, the parrot will appear....” Meng Hao’s eyes filled with determination as he thought these things.

“I must form a Violet Core!” He flicked his sleeve, and was about to go borrow some more Spirit Stones when, suddenly, his entire body trembled.

It wasn’t just him that was shaking, it was everything around him. More than half of the Southern Domain was vibrating, and the center of it all was none other than the Immortal’s corpse, where nearly one hundred thousand Cultivators had gathered in the vicinity of the Rebirth Cave.

The vibration came from the chest of the corpse, as if its heart were beating. It emanated out in all directions, rocking the earth, sending out ripples through the land. As it spread, it touched mountaintops, sweeping through one Sect after another.

The location of the Violet Sect Fate was not incredibly far away, so it was also affected. Many people heard it, and their hearts shook. Meng Hao suddenly paused, lifting his hand up to feel his chest.

He could feel the vibrations which filled everything. Suddenly, his expression changed, because at that moment he realized that, to him, the vibrations sounded like a beckoning.

In his estimation, it was a beckoning that came from none other than the Immortal's corpse, which he had been trying so hard to avoid!

Filling the beckoning was an archaic voice that sounded directly into Meng Hao's mind.

"You.... I know your bloodline. I know where you're from....

"You.... Do you want to know why you could see me in that other world all those years ago...?

"You.... Do you want to know what world that was...?

"I came here for you, and I've been waiting a long time. Come to me. Come to me here.... You will know the truth about everything!"

The voice sounded ancient, as if it were floating through countless years of time, filled with ancient Qi. As it echoed within Meng Hao's mind, it caused his blood vessels to surge. Blood pumped rapidly through his body. Suddenly, on the back of his right hand... a greenish mark appeared! ¹

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1. This mark first appeared on Meng Hao's hand when he reached Foundation Establishment in chapter 100.

Chapter 296: Another Encounter with... Ji!

The mark looked like a magical symbol. It didn't exist on top of his skin, but rather inside his flesh. Meng Hao was not unfamiliar with it; the moment he had reached Foundation Establishment, he had seen this exact same mark.

Today was the second time!

Meng Hao looked at the mark, his mind buzzing.

After a long time, the shaking disappeared. The strange sign which had filled half of the Southern Domain caused even more attention to be drawn to the Immortal's corpse.

Meng Hao stood there within his Immortal's cave for a long time before he lifted his head. His eyes were now filled with a sharp light.

"Just... who is he? Why was I able to see him that year? Why did he fall into the Southern Domain? And why is he able to affect my blood flow, and give rise to this mark.... Was the mark placed upon me by him that year? Or was it part of me all along, there within my flesh from the beginning?" Meng Hao silently thought about the night his father and mother went missing, and the violet wind which had blown outside.

If Meng Hao remembered correctly, when that wind arose, it had swirled around his body. He remembered that it was no ordinary wind, but that it contained some type of power.

Meng Hao thought for a long time, all the way until it was dark outside. A bright light began to shine in his eyes, as well as resolve.

"Regardless of whether this person's words are true or false... I'm going!" Determination gleamed in his eyes. Great reward only comes by taking risks. Cultivators cultivate self-confidence! When a decision has been made, it must be pursued with determination, and without the slightest thought of wavering!

He flicked his right sleeve as he walked out of the Immortal's cave.

Several days later, the sixth group of Cultivators left the Violet Fate Sect.

It consisted of thirty people, who transformed into thirty prismatic beams that shot off into the air. In front of this group was none other than Meng Hao.

He wore the robe of a Violet Furnace Lord, and his long hair whipped about behind him as he shot forward. All of the people behind him looked at him with expressions of veneration, regardless of whether they were from Violet Qi Division or the East Pill Division.

Together, they shot off into the distance at top speed.

Meng Hao was quiet during the entire trip. He didn't speak; within his mind spun the echoing beckons of the Immortal's corpse.

This sixth group of Violet Fate Sect Cultivators teleported three times and spent half a month before arriving in the vicinity of the Rebirth Cave. Once more during that time period, the vibration echoed out.

When the vibration hit them, everyone dropped to the ground, where they sat cross-legged. Only Meng Hao floated in mid-air, looking off into the distance. Once again, he felt the beckoning.

"Come to me.... I'm here... waiting for you.... All the truth... all the answers...."

Meng Hao's mind spun. Of the hundreds of thousands of Cultivators in the region of the Rebirth Cave, the voice within the beckons could only be heard by Meng Hao. His eyes glittered even more relentlessly than before.

There are three Danger Zones in the Southern Domain: the Ancient Dao Lakes, the Ancient Temple of Doom and finally, the Rebirth Cave. At a glance, it looked like an enormous depression in the ground. Multitudinous volcanoes could be seen in the area, so many that they were impossible to count. They seemed to never end.

What was visible was the black sky, and the thick black fog that covered everything.

This was the region of the Rebirth Cave.

According to the legends, people who were nearing death could enter the

Rebirth Cave at the right moment, and if they succeeded, could get a chance to live another life!

Whether this was true or false, since ancient times, many, many almighty Cultivators, unwilling to pass into death, had entered the Rebirth Cave. Throughout the countless years, only three people had ever emerged successfully.

Without exception, after leaving the Rebirth Cave, those three people never once talked about what had happened inside. Eventually, they had disappeared, never to be heard from again.

Despite that, the legends regarding the mysteries of the Rebirth Cave continued to grow more and more exaggerated. Regardless of anything, stories about the Rebirth Cave had been circulating for tens of thousands of years, which was sufficient to show that... it had some astonishing properties.

Meng Hao understood that by proceeding forward, he would be entering the region of the Rebirth Cave. Upon entering, the level of danger would be extreme.

As for the Immortal's corpse, it had fallen directly in front of the Rebirth Cave, no more than fifty kilometers away.

Currently, the vibrations were slowly fading away. As they did, one figure after another shot up from the ground into the air.

Currently, hundreds of thousands of Cultivators from all over the Southern Domain were gathered in a thousand kilometer radius of the Rebirth Cave, forming a perimeter around it. In this area, the Cultivators had established temporary strongholds representing the various Sects and Clans.

Every stronghold contained members of the elder generation of the various Sects. It seemed that every day, more people from a variety of Sects entered this huge region. Many would face the danger and approach the corpse, hoping to seize some luck. Some came back, some never did.

Because of the accumulation of so many hundreds of thousands of

Cultivators, it was impossible to avoid the eruption of various feuds. Therefore, magical battle was not uncommon, and every day at least a few people were killed.

As for the great Sects and Clans, they were under the protection of the elder generation; there was a bit of chaos, but it was kept under relative control.

After the shaking vibration faded away, Meng Hao led the group of dozens of Violet Fate Sect Cultivators into the area. This of course attracted quite a bit of attention, and many people looked over to see what was happening.

When they saw Meng Hao, and recognized his Violet Furnace Lord's robe, a great buzz of discussion rose up.

"That's Fang Mu from the Violet Fate Sect!"

"That's the Dao Child of the East Pill Division, Fang Mu!"

Meng Hao heard some of these words, but his expression was always the same as ever. He continued onward, leading his group further inward toward the area near the Rebirth Cave.

As they flew along, he scanned the area with Spiritual Sense. He could immediately sense a vast amount of Cultivators there. There weren't as many as outside the inner perimeter, perhaps only around ten thousand.

Compared to the area outside, inside the perimeter, the fog was denser, thicker, exerting pressure on Spiritual Sense and making it more difficult to hear and see.

Eventually, Meng Hao caught sight of an enormous basin. Hovering in mid-air above the basin was a roiling black fog that rose up high into the sky.

Beneath the fog, the basin had a perimeter of about 500 kilometers. It was enormous, and within that enormity, was the Southern Domain's mysterious Rebirth Cave.

This was the nucleus of the Rebirth Cave. Surrounding this nucleus were

a dozen or so pillars of light which rose up into the sky. Each and every pillar undulated shockingly, making it impossible for anyone to not notice them.

They embodied shocking power; the existence of these more than ten pillars of light made the huge area surrounding the Rebirth Cave seem a bit less dangerous.

Many of the strange creatures that lived in the area hid away, and would not emerge to harm people.

Each one among the dozen or so pillars of light was fixed at a stationary point. There, large groups of Cultivators sat cross-legged, meditating. Only the five great Sects and three great Clans were capable of creating strongholds like this near the nucleus of the Rebirth Cave region.

As Meng Hao approached, he immediately caught sight of one of the pillars of light that was violet-colored, and emanated an oppressive, pressure-filled energy. Because of this violet pillar of light, not a scrap of black fog could be seen anywhere nearby. Even the ground was a violet color because of it.

Wu Dingqiu ¹ was there inside, as well as Chu Yuyan, An Zaihai, Lin Hailong, and the other Cultivators from the Violet Qi Division. There were roughly a hundred people, all sitting cross-legged, eyes closed in meditation.

Included in the number were two old people, meditating cross-legged in the very center of the glowing pillar. They wore long, white robes, and their countenances were ancient. Meng Hao could sense a fearsome pressure contained within their bodies.

Wu Dingqiu was obviously much weaker than these two old people, by about an entire stage!

“Spirit Severing stage....” Meng Hao took a deep breath. As he continued toward them, his eyes flickered about, glancing toward the other pillars of light. He saw the Solitary Sword Sect, the Black Sieve Sect, the Golden Frost Sect, the Blood Demon Sect, as well as Cultivators from the three

great Clans including Han Bei, Chen Fan, Zhou Jie, Wang Lihai, Li Daoyi and others. ² . Meng Hao's gaze finally came to fall upon a white-robed woman in the Black Sieve Sect group.

Xu Qing.

He stared at her for a moment and then looked away. There were other pillars of light. One was orange-colored, and filled with an air of potency and dignity. Sitting cross-legged within were a few dozen Cultivators upon whose skin were tattooed depictions of various totems. They were tall, and did not look like people from the Southern Domain.

“Western Desert Cultivators....” thought Meng Hao, his eyes narrowing. This wasn't his first time seeing Cultivators from the Western Desert. The first time he'd arrived in the center of the Southern Domain, he'd seen these strange, tall Cultivators.

Meng Hao also knew that the actual name of the Western Desert was the Barbarian West. In fact, that was the name that was written on the map he'd seen years ago. However, the people from the Western Desert felt that the word Barbarian was too belittling, and therefore took up the name Western Desert. This corresponded with the name of the Northern Desert. Despite this, there were still people who called them Western Devils.

As he proceeded onward, Meng Hao's gaze fell upon two other pillars of light. One of them glowed with a light as blue as the sky. Next to it, a large flagpole had been stabbed into the ground. Floating in the wind was a flag embroidered in gold with the character...

Ji!

When he saw it, Meng Hao's pupils constricted, and he began to breathe heavily. There were over ten Cultivators sitting beneath the pillar of light, meditating. One of them was a young man with thin lips, a lofty air, and impatience written on his face. He seemed to have sensed Meng Hao's gaze. He turned and looked over, then gave a cold snort. Contempt flickered within his eyes.

The cold snort immediately entered Meng Hao's mind, causing him to pause momentarily. He quickly rotated his Cultivation base to disperse the uneasy feeling.

“Core Formation stage.” His expression was the same as usual as he looked away. The young man's eyes flashed as he examined Meng Hao for a moment, and then ignored him.

Meng Hao next looked at the other beam of light, which was a greenish color and emanated terrifying power. The Black Sieve Sect's pillar was also greenish, but this color was different, deeper.

Beneath the green pillar, three people sat cross-legged. One was a middle-aged woman, another was an old person, and the third was young woman. The young woman wore a green robe, and her long hair cascaded down over her shoulders. She was rather beautiful, but she also possessed a cold, proud air. She seemed to be the kind of person that had a short temper, and wasn't easy to approach.

As he looked over everyone, Meng Hao stayed calm and collected. He led his group directly toward the Violet Fate Sect's violet pillar of light, and as he neared, quite a few people opened their eyes vigilantly. When they saw Meng Hao, expressions of respect filled their faces.

As for Chu Yuyan, a complicated look appeared in her eyes. Ye Feimu simply lowered his head silently.

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1. Wu Dingqiu was the guy who made the bet with Eccentric Song about the spear. He was also present when Grandmaster Eternal Mountain visited the Violet Fate Sect, and Meng Hao competed against Fatty.
2. Okay here's a quick refresher. Han Bei, sexy schemer. Chen Fan, protective talkative brother. Zhou Jie, possessed Dao Child. Wang Lihai, brother of Wang Tengfei. Li Daoyi, fought Meng Hao in the Blood Immortal Legacy.

Chapter 297: Still Somewhat Pleased With Himself

Wu Dingqiu, who sat there cross-legged, suddenly opened his eyes. After he caught sight of Meng Hao, his face filled with a smile and he nodded. Considering the level of his Cultivation base, and his status within the Violet Qi Division, for him to treat a Foundation Establishment Cultivator in such a fashion was enough to see what position Meng Hao occupied in the Violet Fate Sect.

You could say that Meng Hao even exceeded Wu Dingqiu. If Meng Hao's Cultivation base was any higher, Wu Dingqiu would have been required to rise to his feet.

Meng Hao had been a part of the Cultivation world for years now, and knew that the best way to conduct oneself was without arrogance. He immediately clasped hands and bowed to Wu Dingqiu, which of course caused the man's smile to grow even wider.

Meng Hao's Cultivation base was weak, but his position was high. Because of his lack of arrogance, it caused Wu Dingqiu's favorable impression of him to grow even stronger. Smiling, he said, "Grandmaster Fang, allow me to introduce you to these two Patriarchs." This was a situation of giving a plum in exchange for a peach.

Meng Hao also smiled. Having been introduced by Wu Dingqiu, Meng Hao clasped hands and bowed deeply to the two ancient-looking Patriarchs within the violet pillar of light.

"Junior Fang Mu of the East Pill Division pays respects to the two Patriarchs."

Sitting there cross-legged within the violet pillar of light, their faces covered with wrinkles, they seemed the very picture of intense power. As Meng Hao bowed to them, they opened their eyes slowly, looking him over, their vision filled with abstruseness. They seemed to be committing Meng Hao's Qi to memory.

“Your Cultivation base isn’t sufficient,” said one of them coolly, eyes close. “To the greatest extent possible, do not venture outside. Stay here, and you’ll be fine.” The other Patriarch smiled at Meng Hao, eyes filled with praise.

Meng Hao knew that their good will was all because of his Master.

After Meng Hao payed his respects to the Patriarchs, Wu Dingqiu led him to greet more Cultivators from the Violet Qi Division. All of them treated Meng Hao with utmost politeness. Be it with their words, or the way they carried themselves, they showed complete respect.

Even the Core Formation Cultivators were very respectful to him.

Wu Dingqiu introduced Meng Hao to the Violet Qi Division Cultivators, but as for the East Pill Division disciples, no introductions were needed. One by one, they approached Meng Hao to offer him their respects.

When Meng Hao approached Lin Hailong, An Zaihai and the others, it was noticed by the forces from other Sects in the area. Many gazes fell upon them, most of which lingered on Meng Hao. The expressions of the onlookers instantly changed into shock; clearly most of them had guessed who Meng Hao was.

Meng Hao greeted Lin Hailong, An Zaihai and the others with clasped hands. He looked toward Chu Yuyan and nodded, smiling. He also gave Ye Feimu a glance, then sat down cross-legged.

He was also a Violet Furnace Lord, but he was Grandmaster Pill Demon’s Legacy Apprentice, which was a very high position. According to Sect rules, he was actually higher than a Violet Furnace Lord.

However, Meng Hao knew that his Cultivation base wasn’t very high, so he didn’t want to show off. Therefore, he sat next to An Zaihai, subtly placing Lin Hailong in the center position. Old Lin Hailong was an astute person, so how could he possibly not understand what Meng Hao was doing? He smiled and shook his head, not saying anything to break the facade.

An Zaihai chuckled. Looking at Meng Hao, he lowered his voice and

said, “Elder Brother Lin is just another Violet Furnace Lord. He only cares about the Dao of alchemy....” Before finishing, he stopped, giving Meng Hao a look. He knew that Meng Hao was a smart person, and would be able to ascertain the meaning of his words.

“Don’t worry, Elder Brother An, I understand.” Meng Hao could tell that An Zaihai was trying to make sure that he didn’t brood over the events from the day that Meng Hao was raised to Violet Furnace Lord. Meng Hao smiled, then looked around the area, his eyes eventually coming to rest on the flag with the Ji character on it.

No one knew it, but when he first laid eyes on the flag, his heart was shaken by great waves. Of course, he had covered it up well, not letting the tiniest shred of a reaction be seen.

However, deep in his heart, the character Ji was surrounded by many unfathomable mysteries.

The flag of three streamers was sealed with the surname Ji!

The lifelong wish of the Blood Immortal of Ancient Doom was to refine the blood of the Ji clan into instruments of blood slaughtering!

Furthermore, in the ancient Blessed Land where the Heavens were round and the Earth was square, when he had stood next to the square cauldron that wished to reverse the order of the Cosmos, Meng Hao had experienced a vision in which the cauldron refused to exist under the same sky as the name Ji!

There was also the legend of the ancient World Tree, which had destroyed itself and dissipated into the stars.

All of these things seemed to have connection to the name Ji. There were countless ties that caused Meng Hao to tremble uncontrollably. This was especially true now, after seeing the name with his own eyes, branded onto that flag.

Having noticed what Meng Hao was looking at, An Zaihai was silent for a moment, then quietly said, “That’s the Ji Clan from the Eastern Lands!” It seemed almost as if he was worried others might hear, and thus lowered

his voice in caution. He seemed to be jumpy when talking about the name, even filled with dread, as if he were an ant discussing an elephant.

Meng Hao's eyes glittered imperceptibly. When he heard the fear in An Zaihai's voice, he looked over at him.

"I don't know much about their Clan," continued An Zaihai, his voice still low. "Everything I know is what I've heard from Master. The Ji Clan from the Eastern Lands is the number one clan in the Nanshan Continent.... Their base, of course, is in the Eastern Lands, and no one knows exactly how deep their power runs. However, you must absolutely, positively never forget that the Ji Clan is by no means, under any circumstances, to be provoked!"

His voice was so low that only Meng Hao could hear his words. "There actually aren't very many Clan members, but any one of them should be considered beyond provocation. This is especially true of any Quasi-Array Sons of Ji. Every one is inestimably highly ranked. The one you saw just now...

"If my guess is correct, he is definitely one of the Sons of Ji, of the Quasi-Array of the Ji Clan. If he were not, he wouldn't be of the Core Formation stage, considering how young he is. Ji Clan members, especially those of the Quasi-Array, are all Chosen. Every generation must undergo a variety of intense training regimens to prepare to fight for one of the one hundred spots available for true Array Clan members. I only know this much, which Master happened to casually mention once."

Meng Hao sat there thoughtfully. He, too, only had a very basic understanding of the Ji Clan. Based on all of his experiences related to Ji, he was sure that they possessed fearsomely deep resources, perhaps infinitely beyond what anyone understood.

His voice low, An Zaihai glanced over at the green pillar of light, and the three people sitting cross-legged therein, and continued, "You must not provoke those three any more than you should the people from the Ji Clan. They are another of the most powerful Clans in the Nanshan Continent. Fearsome! You came to the scene a bit late, so you don't know

all the details of everything that's happened. I personally witnessed one of the Ji Clan Cultivators address that girl as a member of the Fang Clan, and he looked scared ¹. Think about it! What sort of profound background must those three have in order to inspire fear into the Ji Clan? They must also be from the Eastern Lands."

Thanks to An Zaihai's explanation, Meng Hao now had a general understanding of the various forces in the area. He continued to look around, and as he did, his eyes suddenly locked with Xu Qing's.

Neither said a word; everything was spoken through the look they exchanged. Their gazes quickly separated, but not before both understood everything that needed to be understood.

Han Bei, Wang Youcai, Li Shiqi, Li Daoyi, Zhou Jie, Wang Lihai, Han Shandao, Chen Fan as well as Song Yunshu from the Song Clan, along with beautiful, bitter Song Jia, were all familiar to Meng Hao. All were present among the forces of their various Sects and Clans. Scanning over everyone, Meng Hao didn't see Fatty anywhere.

Time passed by. Meng Hao wasn't sure what everyone was waiting for, but he didn't see anyone leave the area of the pillar of light.

Eventually, the black fog up above grew even darker. It was at this moment that Chu Yuyan approached Meng Hao and sat down next to him. She looked at him intently.

Meng Hao had always felt that her intuition was far too keen. However, he kept his expression the same as ever as he looked back at her.

When their gazes met, Chu Yuyan didn't look away.

"From the year you arrived in the East Pill Division," she said softly, "I felt annoyed every time I looked at you. I've never been able to figure it out. However, perhaps... it's possible that I saw you somewhere before in the past!"

Meng Hao's expression looked the same as it always did. However, inside, his heart pounded with shock. He sighed again inwardly because of Chu Yuyan's frightening thinking ability.

“Where exactly did we see each other before?” she said suddenly, staring into Meng Hao’s eyes as if looking for some clues.

After a long moment, she could tell that Meng Hao was not going to reply.

She looked at him intently. “I don’t care if you’re Pill Cauldron or Fang Mu,” she said, one word at a time. “I know that you have another identity. You’re not willing to talk about it, so I won’t ask. But one of these days I’m going to find out. I’m going to find out... who you are!” There was a trace of radiance within her stubbornness. It was faint, but Meng Hao could see it clearly. It was a glow that sprang up when she first talked about Grandmaster Pill Cauldron.

“Impossible....” he said to himself. Although he had never experienced the type of relationship that could exist between a man and a woman, he was no longer an ignorant youth, and was capable of picking up on much of such interactions.

That glow in her eyes was very similar to the glow that had been in Xu Qing’s eyes when they had parted outside the Black Sieve Sect.

Meng Hao felt a little bit guilty, but also a bit proud. Chu Yuyan had been pestering him for years, even when she was engaged to Wang Tengfei. For her to change in this way, actually made him feel somewhat pleased with himself.

He cleared his throat, deciding that it was time to prove whether or not his speculations were correct. He lifted his right hand. Chu Yuyan watched, stupefied, as he reached out to place his hand onto her beautiful face.

Immediately, her face turned crimson and her eyes went wide. Clearly she had never imagined that Fang Mu would possibly be so rude.

Before he could actually touch her, he pulled his hand back, then looked at her and sighed.

As he sighed, Chu Yuyan’s face grew even redder. Fury blossomed in her phoenix-like eyes. She glared at Meng Hao, clearly on the verge of flying

into a rage from shame.

It was at this moment that, suddenly, a shocking roar filled the entire area surrounding the basin. Immediately, the two Violet Fate Sect Patriarchs opened their eyes. The Patriarchs in the other nearby beams of light similarly opened their eyes.

In almost the same instant, all of them, nearly twenty people, flew out toward the basin. Wu Dingqiu's eyes began to glow and he spoke to the surrounding Violet Fate Sect disciples.

"It's starting again. The Patriarchs from the various Sects will suppress the area surrounding the Rebirth Cave. We must move as quickly as possible. Remember, the Violet Qi Division will cooperate with the East Pill Division. We must acquire a sample of blood from the corpse!"

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1. This character Fang is a common surname, the same Fang as in Meng Hao's assumed name, Fang Mu. 方

Chapter 298: The Corpse Moved!

Wu Dingqiu's eyes glittered as he leaped into the air and began to fly forward. "East Pill Division disciples, do not touch any part of the corpse!" he cried. "Violet Qi Division, follow my lead. We will have the time it takes an incense stick to burn! Let's take advantage of that time to acquire some of this Immortal's blood!"

The Violet Qi Division Cultivators flew into the air with him. The East Pill Division Cultivators around Meng Hao also began to shoot into the air to follow.

Chu Yuyan glared viciously at Meng Hao for a moment. Then she turned her supple waist and flexed her long legs. As she turned, her robe pulled tight around her firm rear end, which Meng Hao couldn't help but notice. She, along with Lin Hailong and the other alchemist Cultivators all shot off toward the basin surrounding the Rebirth Cave.

Of course, that is exactly where the Immortal's corpse was located.

Meng Hao took a deep breath. He was no longer thinking about the matter regarding Chu Yuyan. Instead, as he flew up into the air, he focused his thoughts. Flying next to him was none other than Ye Feimu.

Ye Feimu was quiet for the space of a few breaths, then began to explain to Meng Hao what was going on, "There is nothing blocking the way to the corpse. However, if you touch it, you will instantly be sucked into a strange realm. Some people return from it, others don't. Every day at about this time, the strange power of the corpse suddenly drops by half. Therefore, when this happens, the bizarre life within the Rebirth Cave will emerge.

"Therefore, the Patriarchs from the various Sects will go ahead to stand guard, giving the rest of the Sect disciples a window of time. Unlike some of the other Sects, all we need is a sample of blood. As for the Violet Qi Division, it's possible they have some other goals. However, they will cooperate with us. After we get some blood, then we can focus on other priorities.

"The reason so many alchemists and Violet Furnace Lords are here is

because the blood from the Immortal's corpse is actually invisible. The instant it leaves the corpse, it dissipates into Heaven and Earth. Only us Cultivators of the Dao of alchemy can take advantage of that instant to use pill concoction techniques to capture and refine the escaping blood."

Ye Feimu's explanation was extremely detailed. Once he finished, he lowered his head and increased his speed as he proceeded forward. It seemed the only reason he had been hanging back was to explain these things to Meng Hao.

Meng Hao could sense the ease in tension between them. However, a bit of challenge still existed within his words, as if he wanted to warn Meng Hao that he would be waiting to see who would be the first to refine some of the Immortal's blood.

Meng Hao had not come here for any blood sample, though. He had come because of the beckoning voice. Everyone else might be unaware, but Meng Hao knew that this person... was not dead at all!

Many thoughts flowed through his head as he transformed into a beam of light that shot forward. He flashed through the air, soon catching sight of Li Daoyi, Zhou Jie, Xu Qing and the others. All of them were converging on the basin.

What most captured Meng Hao's attention was the young man named Ji. His Cultivation base was at the peak of the early Core Formation stage, and he was surrounded by seven or eight guards, all of them old men. He moved forward, his entire body exuding a lofty and proud air. Completely disregarding all of the surrounding Southern Domain Cultivators, he sped off into the distance.

At the same time, the young woman surnamed Fang shot forward, her face filled with cold indifference, her entire body emanating blinding silver light. The beams of light shot off of her like sharp arrows, causing anyone who looked at her to feel stabs of pain.

The Ji youth and the Fang girl were both matchlessly stunning. Whether intentionally or not, they had long since become the focus of attention in the area. Next to them, anyone, be they Chosen or Dao Child, were like

ants. The difference in status was just too great. This of course caused the Southern Domain's Chosen and Dao Children to feel somewhat recalcitrant. However, keeping in mind the warnings of their various Sects, and fearsome power of the two, they maintained their silence.

The Western Desert Cultivators were also present. They were big and tall, and their bodies were covered with totemic tattoos. As they flew forward toward the basin, their totems shone with rays of bright light, clearly beyond ordinary.

A short amount of time passed, and soon, the moment of opportunity arrived for any Cultivator who neared. It didn't matter what purpose the various Sects had, all their disciples charged forward.

In fact, many of the disciples from the other Sects outside of the main periphery, had calculated the time and were now charging forward too.

Meng Hao focused himself, accelerating for the space of about ten or more breaths. Suddenly, he felt as if a wind were blowing up against him. The wind carried with it the stench of decay, and as it passed over him, he felt his skin becoming sticky, as if he were covered in sweat.

The bizarre wind of decay penetrated into his flesh, piercing through him, causing his expression to change. He could immediately sense that everyone around him was feeling the exact same thing.

At the same time, the Qi of the Nascent Soul Cultivators from the various clans began to weaken, as if it were being violently suppressed. Meng Hao recalled being told about this phenomena when he first arrived.

It didn't take long for Wu Dingqiu's Cultivation base to be suppressed down to the great circle of Core Formation. His face was pale as he led everyone forward through the black fog, closer and closer to the mountain-like corpse.

The instant Meng Hao caught sight of the corpse, he saw that it really was the size of a small mountain. Its skin was gray, and covered with brands that looked like magical symbols. The symbols seemed to squirm bizarrely, and emitted glowing light.

The five-colored light twisted up into the air, but was obscured by the black fog, making it difficult to see clearly. However, the closer he got, the clearer it became. The magical symbols were obviously grouping together into a larger text.

As the Cultivators from the other Sects approached and saw the magical text, someone cried out, "The Dao Divinity Scripture!" More and more Cultivators neared, and more than half of them sank to the ground cross-legged to stare at the scriptural text.

Some of the Violet Fate Sect disciples also stopped and sat down cross-legged to stare at the magical symbols. Meng Hao glanced over, frowning slightly. In that slight glance, he suddenly realized that his Spiritual Sense was showing signs of disorder.

He immediately focused his vision, looking toward the corpse. Disciples from other Sects who were clearly more interested in the corpse itself were now nearing it.

As he approached, its sheer vastness filled his vision. Wu Dingqiu led the Violet Qi Division disciples, clearly fearful of the strange teleportation effect. All he intended to do was break the skin of the corpse and extract some blood. Suddenly, the beckoning feeling once again appeared, floating deep within Meng Hao's mind.

"Come.... Come to me.... I've been waiting a long time for you.... The whole truth, all the answers, will be explained to you, my heir...."

The beckoning filled Meng Hao's whole body, causing him to tremble. Looking around, it was clear that no one else could hear the sounds which he was now hearing in his ears, the calling.

The instant he began to look around, a roaring sound suddenly began to fill the air, coming from the corpse itself. At the same time, the ground began to shake. The entire Rebirth Cave basin began to quake violently.

A thunderous sound echoed out, causing the surrounding Cultivator's expressions to change immediately.

"It moved!!" cried someone from one of the other Sects. "I just saw the

corpse's hand move!"

"That's impossible! This corpse has been dead for years. How could it possibly move!?"

"I saw it too! The corpse's hand moved a bit.... It couldn't have been an illusion...."

Meng Hao began to pant. He too had just seen the supposedly dead corpse move its right hand!

He knew that he wasn't mistaken. After all, he had known from quite some time ago that this supposed corpse... was actually alive!

As gasps of astonishment filled the air, and the thunderous sound filled the air, all eyes instantly swivelled to look toward the corpse. The corpse... slowly lifted its enormous hand into the air. The speed with which it moved seemed slow, but within the blink of an eye, the hand had reached up high, as if it were going to place its hand on its head. Instead, its hand suddenly descended at high speed toward the ground.

This caused everyone's scalps to go numb, and to gape with wide eyes. Just as everyone was about to shoot backward in retreat... the hand slammed into the ground.

BOOM!

BOOM!

BOOM!

An indescribably loud sound shattered the air. The ground quaked, and the sky drained of color. At the same time, the black fog shot up into the sky. The earth rippled into great waves, sweeping out as if it were an attack.

Bloodcurdling screams filled the air. Everything went dim, and was thrown into chaos.

The shocking boom resonated out, and the ground heaved. The faces of the various Sect Patriarchs who were leading the way to the Rebirth Cave immediately fell. At the same time, the fog floating in the sky began to

seethe violently, then shoot back toward the ground.

Next, an incredible, indescribable suction force sprang into being. It emanated out from the corpse, immediately beginning to drag everything in the area toward the corpse. The nearby Cultivators had no time to avoid it, and were instantly snagged by the force and sucked in. As soon as they touched the surface of the corpse, they disappeared.

Li Shiqi, Wang Youcai, Li Daoyi, Wang Lihai, Zhou Jie, Chen Fan, all of them were instantly grabbed by the wild suction force. In the blink of an eye, they were sent tumbling toward the corpse, and then disappeared, teleported to who knew what strange place.

Next to Meng Hao, Chu Yuyan and Ye Feimu, as well as the rest of the East Pill Division and Violet Qi Division Cultivators, were incapable of evading. All of them were sent spinning toward the corpse, and then disappeared.

To Meng Hao, it felt as if some enormous hand had grabbed him and was dragging him toward the corpse. There was nothing he could do to prevent it. His expression, however, was calm. He could tell that the force which was grabbing him contained no evil. If it did, then considering its abilities, even if he tried to escape far way, he still wouldn't be safe. This he knew.

“Well, you’ve called for me three times already, I might as well go along!” His eyes shone brightly. After feeling the beckoning three times, and hearing the words contained therein, he had long since understood that he absolutely must come here!

The importance of Heaven and Earth is superseded by the importance of one’s father and mother.

The matter of his parents had weighed on his heart from the very beginning. He had an intense feeling that this was his chance to get some answers!

The instant he touched the corpse and vanished, Meng Hao saw the Ji Clan youth and the young Fang woman also being sucked in and vanishing.

After that, everything went black....

Chapter 299: Destroying Totems in the Maze

In the same instant, the world in front of him was no longer black, but filled with grayish light. Meng Hao could clearly tell that just now, his body had been affected by a teleportation spell.

The teleportation had moved him somewhere, although he wasn't sure exactly where.

When things became clear, Meng Hao looked around. Immediately, his brow furrowed.

He saw an ancient wall, which was flecked with spots of blood that had been there for who knew how many years. Looking overhead, it seemed as if the wall stretched up into the Heavens themselves. Apparently, it was endlessly high.

There wasn't just one wall, but two, forming a corridor. Meng Hao's eyes flickered. He didn't go forward down the corridor, but rather, flew straight into the air.

He shot upward for a while. However, even after focusing the power of his Cultivation base into his eyes, he still was incapable of seeing the tops of the walls.

"They have no end...." he thought, slowly floating back down. He didn't land onto the ground, but rather floated there in mid-air.

This place had a stifling air; it seemed that there were only two paths to pick from, either forward, or backward.

Meng Hao thought of the other Cultivators who had touched the corpse, and of the things they had talked about. Upon returning, each had described different scenes. One saw mountains, another a river. One saw buildings, another, Celestial scenes. One even saw a battlefield.

Meng Hao thoughtfully lifted his hand into the air, and then struck out seven or eight times. A roaring filled the air as a black-colored palm

appeared that looked as if it were formed from roiling mist. It shot forward toward one of the walls.

Considering its incredible speed, it only took a moment before it slammed into the wall. No sound could be heard; it was like the palm had been sucked in by the wall. There wasn't even the tiniest mark left now.

Meng Hao's face sank.

Just now, he had only attacked with fifty percent power. However, considering he was of the full circle of Foundation Establishment, he could easily smash a wall into powder. However, this wall didn't even tremble.

After a moment's thought, Meng Hao set his jaw. Eyes glittering, he shot forward. If he couldn't fly up, and the walls were unbreakable, then he might as well go forward.

He whistled through the air at top speed, heading forward. Before he got too far, the two walls on either side of him began to grow wider apart. The area in front of him grew larger, and another wall appeared, causing the path to split into two.

When he saw the path split ahead of him, realization flickered in his eyes.

"A maze...."

Meanwhile, elsewhere in the maze, Li Daoyi shot forward, grim faced, as did Zhou Jie, Wang Lihai, Xu Qing, Han Bei and the others. All of them were inside the maze.

So was the young man from the Ji Clan as well as the girl surnamed Fang. All of them were in different areas of this huge maze.

So far, no one had encountered any of the others, which made everyone come to the conclusion that they were alone inside.

In the past, whoever had returned after touching the Immortal's corpse, described being teleported to different places. Never had there been a repetition.

Days passed. Meng Hao's expression was calm. He had encountered

many junctions in the path, and never once did he hesitate. He would pick a road and proceed forward without thinking too much about it.

“Considering you called me here, well... I’m not going to go looking for you. You’ll show up eventually.” He flew along calmly for several days. One day, a five-path junction appeared up ahead of him. Meng Hao glanced it over, and was about to pick the center path, when suddenly his eyes flickered, and he retreated backward.

At the same time, he lifted his right hand, quickly slicing his index finger as he shot back, and then waved it toward the intersection.

Even as he moved backward, a black streak like lightning shot toward him through the air. If he hadn’t retreated just now, he definitely would have been seriously injured.

Instead, his finger attack just now erupted with billowing killing blood Qi. It slammed into the incoming black streak.

An explosion filled the air. As it rang out, Meng Hao’s face grew grim, and killing intent flickered within his eyes. He fell back three more paces and then came to a stop. He lifted his hand again, and as he did, violet Qi swirled around his body. The Qi flowed toward his hand, transforming into a long, violet-colored blade.

Suddenly, he moved forward without hesitation, and as he did, he waved his hand ahead in a chopping motion.

A rumble filled the air as a flash of violet light slashed out from his hand, transforming midair into a curved, three meter long arc. Wisps of violet Qi continued to emanate out from Meng Hao, melding into the curved shape.

This was... the Violet Qi Guillotine! ¹

Filled with the power of a Perfect Foundation, ten Dao Pillars and Violet Qi from the East, this was a deadly magical attack.

The Violet Qi Guillotine looked like a crescent moon as it shot through the air toward the intersection. As it entered the crossroads, the air distorted around it, rippling. The emptiness twisted, making what had

seemed like a void before look as if it were covered with a veil that was now being lifted up. Suddenly, a figure became visible.

It was a middle-aged man. He was more than three heads taller than Meng Hao, and incredibly muscular. He wore a simple garment, and visible on his skin was a depiction of a three-headed flood dragon totem!

This was a Cultivator from the Western Desert!!

Now that he had been revealed, he suddenly lifted his right arm and opened his mouth with a shout. A black glow emerged from his forehead. The totem covering his body began to glow with a black aura, and in front of him, an incredibly realistic image of a three-headed flood dragon appeared. Roaring, it shot forward and tore into the Violet Qi Guillotine.

A boom filled the air, rocking everything. Meng Hao watched as the Violet Qi Guillotine began to disintegrate, transforming into wisps of violet Qi that dissipated into the air. At the same time, the three-headed flood dragon also began to break up into pieces. The Western Desert Cultivator's face was unsightly as he stared in shock at Meng Hao.

Meng Hao gave a cold snort, lifting his hand and waving it forward.

"Violet Qi Garrote!" As he waved his hand, the Violet Qi in the area suddenly stilled. Then it began to twist, extending, transforming into countless threads that circled around the Western Desert Cultivator. It rapidly surrounded him, emitting sharp whistling sounds. Suddenly, Meng Hao clenched his hand into a fist, and the strands of Violet Qi contracted.

This technique was something Meng Hao had learned after becoming a Violet Furnace Lord. This was the second form of the Violet Qi Guillotine, a technique from the Violet Qi Division. In addition to this second form, there was a third form called Violet Gibbous Moon!

The Western Desert Cultivator's face was dark as the Violet Qi Garrote closed in around him. He gave a cold harrumph, then began to lift his right arm, upon the back of which suddenly appeared a totem.

This totem was simple; it was a red fist, about the size of an infant's hand. However, in the blink of an eye, a roaring power exploded out from

the body of the Western Desert Cultivator.

The hand of his upraised arm clenched into a fist and punched downward.

The fist hit nothing but air, but as it did, layers of ripples surged out. The piercing shriek of an infant could be heard, and as it echoed out, the ripples slammed into the surrounding violet Qi. Immediately, the violet Qi began to disintegrate.

The face of the Western Desert Cultivator was pale. Blood oozed out of the corners of his mouth. He looked toward Meng Hao with fear in his eyes.

“You’re an alchemist from the Southern Domain’s Violet Fate Sect,” he said, retreating backward. “I never imagined that you would have a Cultivation base such as this. Sir, I was rash just now. I’ll take my leave.” A third totem appeared on his left arm, but it appeared to be only half completed, not a full totem. The Cultivator’s body began to grow blurry, as if he would disappear into the air.

“A bit rash?” said Meng Hao, his eyes glittering with killing intent. If he hadn’t dodged at just the right time, he would have been beheaded. Even as the words left his mouth, he shot forward.

“You Southern Domain Cultivators really don’t know when to give up!” said the Western Desert Cultivator with a cold snort. “It’s obvious that we’re both in the Pseudo Core stage. You used full power just now! Clearly we’re an even match!” Ferocity suddenly filled his face.

His expression had changed because as Meng Hao advanced, he began to rotate his Cultivation base, causing power to explode out. This power was even greater than that from before, causing everything in the area to shake.

Meng Hao lifted up his right hand and extended three fingers!

A shocking three fingered Blood Palm appeared. It transformed into a murderous blood Qi which shot toward the Western Desert Cultivator.

“Live through this three finger strike and you can leave!”

The face of the Western Desert Cultivator flickered, filling with astonishment. The blurriness surrounding his body instantly disappeared; he couldn't possibly maintain his invisibility. He lifted his hand and tapped his forehead; the three-headed flood dragon totem, as well as the blood-colored fist totem, both appeared and shot forward.

Meng Hao's three-fingered blood palm slammed into them.

The resulting massive boom echoed out in all directions. The Western Desert Cultivator let out a blood-curdling scream. His body shook as the fist totem shattered. Blood sprayed from his mouth as the three-headed flood dragon totem disintegrated. He retreated backward several paces, his face pale. Before he could say a single word, a single Blood Finger slammed into his forehead.

A tremor ran through his body, and he toppled to the ground, dead.

Meng Hao approached. He looked down at the dead Western Desert Cultivator, whose name he didn't even know. He knelt down next to the body and fished out a bag of holding. His eyes shone with thoughtfulness.

"So, it seems I'm not alone in this place.... These Western Desert Cultivators have some strange techniques. They're as different from those of the Southern Domain as black is from white.... If not, a single Blood Finger would have been sufficient to slay a Pseudo Core Cultivator." Giving a final glance to the Western Desert Cultivator, he noticed that the totem on the man's arms were fading and transforming into black ink.

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1. Meng Hao learned the Violet Qi Guillotine way back in chapter 242.

Chapter 300: An Ancient Starry Sky

“The Western Desert....” Meng Hao frowned. On this side of the Milky Way Sea was the Western Desert and the Southern Domain; in the middle of the two were the Black Lands, which weren’t very large.

The Black Lands were the only passageway between the Southern Domain and the Western Desert. Other places had long since been sealed by Patriarch Cultivators from either of the two major powers, creating two continents or territories.

Throughout history, there had been two great, world-shaking wars between the two continents. During those two great wars, all of the Sects of both the Western Desert and the Southern Domain had participated. Such wars were not the type between two Sects or Clans. They were major wars between both of the enormous powers.

The aggressor in both wars was the Western Desert!

The Western Desert’s cultivation resources were extremely limited; furthermore, the climate was abominable and the spiritual energy scarce. Despite all that, it produced many outstanding individuals. Thus, in the midst of all the hardships, the Western Desert’s power grew greater and greater.

In the Western Desert, cultivation was not the focal point; the most important thing was survival. There, the law of the jungle was even more brutal, many times more so than in the Southern Domain. Under such circumstances, Cultivators with talent, who stood out like awls sticking out through a bag, were generally much more powerful than their Southern Domain counterparts of the same level.

They envied the Southern Domain’s riches and fertility. Thus, they went to war!

The two wars were what had given shape to the enormous sealed demarkation between the West and the South.

Meng Hao lifted his hand; a Flame Sea surged out, completely burning

the Western Desert Cultivator's body into ash. Eyes flashing, Meng Hao transformed into a beam of light and proceeded onward, even more vigilantly than before.

Time slowly passed by. Within this maze were not just Cultivators from the Western Desert, but also locals from the Southern Domain. When they ran into each other, sometimes they would help each other, other times fighting would erupt. Everything was quite chaotic.

In the outside world, the Patriarchs from the various Sects had returned to their pillars of light.

By now, anxiety could be seen on their faces. A month had already passed, and not one person had returned.

A phenomenon such as this had never occurred in the past. Previously, upon touching the corpse, people would be teleported away, but at the most, they would be gone for half a month, and then would be teleported back. Either that or... they died!

Another change from before was that a month ago, a shield had sprung up around the corpse that prevented anyone from nearing it. No one could get past the shield, not even Spirit Severing Patriarchs.

However, they could sense that the shield was some type of Qi which was emanating from the corpse. It was easy to speculate that this Qi was... life force!

This supposed Immortal was not dead! He still had one breath left!

The Southern Domain was shaken to the core. Even more Patriarchs arrived, but none of them were able to do a single thing. The only other option for the short term was to use some precious treasures to burst open the shield. However... it was obvious to them that even without the use of precious treasures, the shield would naturally dissipate within another month.

Also, the Sects could not help but notice that the majority of the life slips of their various disciples were still intact, and had not been shattered. Obviously, most of the disciples were alive, although in danger. For the

moment, the best thing to do was to wait.

After all, even though no one spoke it out loud, how could the Patriarchs not see that the shield was less of an obstruction, and more of a protection? The mass disappearance of all the disciples was dangerous, but could also be viewed as a stroke of luck.

This was obviously... a legacy!

Within the maze, the Chosen and Dao Children were using a variety of methods to attempt to find exits. None had succeeded so far. However... more than a few had acquired various bits of luck.

For example, at the moment, Chu Yuyan was breathing heavily. She had just reached the end of a fork in the road. Up ahead was a huge wall covered with pill formulas. Each and every one sent her mind reeling.

Li Shiqi reached an area filled with buildings. She stared out at them for a while before realizing that she was surrounded by phantom figures that were walking to and fro.

It was as if she had discovered some strange world in which she was simply an observer.

The young man from the Ji Clan, the Quasi-Array Cultivator, stood proudly with hands clasped behind his back as he looked out over a huge battlefield. The endless wreckage surrounding him didn't cause his expression to change in the slightest. He strolled aimlessly for a while until a coffin appeared in front of him.

As for the young woman from the Fang Clan of the Eastern Lands, her expression was cool as she walked through a Celestial land. White cranes flew overhead and the surroundings were incredibly beautiful.

Li Daoyi, Wang Youcai, Han Shandao, Chen Fan as well as Xu Qing and Han Bei, were all in various regions of the maze. As it turned out, the scenes they were witnessing were the very same scenes that had been seen by others who had entered the maze previously!

After traveling for many days, Meng Hao's path finally reached an end, as he emerged into a new world.

More accurately, it was a vast field of stars!

Endless, uncountable stars, emitting glorious starlight. Everything was quiet; not the slightest sound could be heard. Meng Hao walked amongst the stars, looking around. As he did, he sensed the power of Time; he could feel the vestiges of archaic ancientness in this place.

The ancientness felt like the decay of more than a hundred thousand years. It was filled with an incomparable exhaustion, as if it were struggling to find a single breath within which pulsed the will to live.

This field of stars felt unfamiliar to Meng Hao. The starry sky that he normally saw when he looked up at night... was completely different!

There didn't seem to be even a single star that was the same. These heavenly bodies emanated ancientness; after gazing upon them, it was clear that this was not the night sky of the Southern Domain. Meng Hao felt a tiny sensation, as if he were somehow melding together with these stars. When the feeling rose up, a profound sense of confidence and hope suddenly floated in his heart.

It was a strange feeling.

Meng Hao knew that every person who was teleported from the corpse into this place, and then returned, all saw something different. However, all of the places that people had seen before, were now being revisited by the people currently inside. Except for this starry sky....

From beginning to end no one, neither those who had lived, nor those who had died, had laid eyes on this scene.

Meng Hao was the only one!

As he contemplated matters, Meng Hao suddenly looked down toward his feet. He could sense that far beneath him was a particular heavenly body that was emitting some sort of beckoning power. He felt himself being rapidly pulled toward it.

The speed was hard to describe. He saw the heavenly body growing larger and larger, until it filled his entire field of view. He saw clouds, and then a sea, and then land.

The land stretched out limitlessly. Meng Hao could see mountain peaks and rivers, and then, suddenly a particular mountain appeared in front of him. It was nighttime, and overhead, the stars were visible. Without thinking about it, Meng Hao compared the sky to that of the Southern Domain. His heart trembled.

It was true! This starry sky was absolutely different!

The stars were clearer, as if there were nothing obscuring their glory; their ancientness, their archaicness, was clearly visible. It was impossible to tell how long they had hung there in the sky.

All of the stars were strange. Not a single one was a star that existed in the sky of the Southern Domain.

“These are the ancient stars which exist in my memory,” said a calm voice from behind Meng Hao. Meng Hao slowly turned. He wasn’t sure when, but at some point a middle-aged man had appeared there, sitting on top of a boulder.

The man wore a simple but elegant robe. His long, black hair flowed over his body. He was handsome, with a bit of a heretical aura in his face. He looked different than the corpse Meng Hao had seen back from the Tower of Tang; however, if you looked closely, you could see that it was the same person.

Surprisingly, a small campfire burned in front of the man. Above the flames, he was roasting... a snake-like creature.

“Sit,” said the man coolly.

Meng Hao stood there thoughtfully for a moment, then approached and sat down. He looked at the bizarre snake roasting over the fire. It had claws, and despite being charred, it wasn’t completely dead yet; it was still struggling.

Even more shocking to Meng Hao was that the snake had horns like that of a deer. He stared at it even closer; its body was almost as black as a piece of coal, but even still, he could pick up some clues. He suddenly gasped.

“This is....”

“A White Dragon, that’s all,” said the man casually. “It has a limitless Cultivation base that brings it close to the first level of the Immortal Realm. I ran into it on the Eighth Mountain. It was hungry and wanted to eat me. However, I was also hungry.” Meng Hao wasn’t sure how powerful the first level of the Immortal Realm was, nor exactly what the Eighth Mountain was. However, he was able to sense that this White Dragon was shockingly powerful.

“Want to have a bite?” asked the man, looking at Meng Hao. He lifted up the White Dragon, which was about the length of an arm, and then quickly chopped it into two pieces. “Do you like the head more, or the tail?” he asked.

Meng Hao hesitated, causing the man to laugh scoffingly.

“Uh... I’ll have the head,” Meng Hao said finally.

“You sure know how to eat, kid,” replied the man, handing over the front half of the White Dragon.

Meng Hao took it, feeling somewhat trepidatious. He looked over as the man took a large bite from the tail part of the White Dragon. After the first bite, he took another, then another, crunching the creature into pieces as he did. Meng Hao took a deep breath, eyeing the front half of the White Dragon. Telling himself that this was just an illusion, he placed it into his mouth.

Crunch, crunch, he began to eat it. The head was very crispy, and the flavor was actually quite delicious. His eyes lit up and he quickly consumed the entire thing. Soon, the whole front half of the White Dragon was in his belly.

“Good?” asked the man with a laugh, looking at Meng Hao. “I used to eat one every year.”

“It doesn’t taste bad at all,” said Meng Hao, looking a bit embarrassed.

“Actually, you know what tastes even better than White Dragons? Flying Rain-Dragons, just like the one you have inside of you. Boil them into a

soup, and the flavor is amazing. Unfortunately, Flying Rain-Dragons are quite rare. Once they grow up, tangling with them is very difficult. If I'm lucky, I might pursue one for thirty thousand years before being able to have some of that soup." The man licked his lips and looked down toward Meng Hao's dantian.

The look in the man's eyes caused Meng Hao to take a deep breath. This was because he had suddenly noticed that his first Dao Pillar, the one with the Flying Rain-Dragon Core inside of it, was suddenly trembling in intense fear.

Chapter 301: Immortal Shows the Way

Meng Hao quickly decided to change the topic. “Senior, sir, I’m sure you didn’t just call me here to eat some White Dragon.” The way the man had looked at him just now made him feel like food, and had caused his scalp to go numb.

Only at this point did the man reluctantly look back up. From the look if it, it took quite a bit of willpower to do so. He tilted his head back to look up at the stars.

“These stars come from my memories of ancient times....” said the man softly, sounding a bit melancholy. “Unfortunately, I’ve been asleep for far too long.... When I woke up, I was here, in this land. I couldn’t tell if the starry sky was the same or not, or whether there were more stars or fewer.

“Listen up, kid. My surname is Choumen. I was born outside the Seventh Mountain, on Planet Tiger Cage. My full name is Choumen Tai! ¹ The man looked back down from the stars and stared at Meng Hao with a solemn expression.

“Because I was on good terms with an old friend from the Eighth Mountain, I took part in the Dao War between the Eighth and Ninth Mountains. During the course of the war, I was seriously injured. I should have perished, but I had one breath left that has kept me going until now.

“I may die, but I will not allow my legacy to end with me.... As for you, the moment you saw me way back then, I acquired the coordinates to this planet, allowing me to fall here ² . You have a special bloodline. If you’re lucky, you should be able to leave this tiny Planet South Heaven, travel to my home and return the legacy....

“That is my hope. If you’re able to do it, well and good. If not, I still won’t have any regrets!” He studied Meng Hao for a moment. “I have three boons to bestow upon you, as way of repayment!

“The first boon is a mark that I created after I achieved enlightenment and gained Immortality. Its name is ‘Immortal Shows the Way.’ Only

someone who has ascended to Immortality in the Nine Mountains and Seas, and who is willing to sacrifice some Cultivation base, can create something like this. It was supposed to be given to my descendants as a treasure.

“When you are of the great circle of Dao Seeking, you can use it to step from that peak toward Immortal Ascension. Someone will show you the way, and your chances of succeeding in Immortal Ascension will increase by thirty percent!

“By the way, after achieving Immortal Ascension, you won’t just attract the powerhouses of this planet; you’ll be catching the interest of all the heavenly bodies!!” He lifted his hand up and pressed down on his forehead. A resplendent ball of light immediately appeared.

The glowing ball of light emanated a Qi which did not belong to this world. As soon as Meng Hao sensed it, his mind began buzzing. He had the powerful feeling that this light contained a fearsome power. Were it to detonate, it could turn the entire Southern Domain into ash.

“This....” Meng Hao began to pant as he stared at the glowing ball of light in the man’s hand. Meng Hao could also sense that when the Qi emerged, the man instantly grew weaker by almost half. The stars and the land around them seemed to grow more unstable, even blurry.

“Immortal Ascension is difficult... but with this Immortal Shows the Way, that difficulty will be reduced by quite a lot. All you have to do is continue to grow until you reach that point. When that time comes, you will most likely be able to make the final step!

“This item is the first boon I shall bestow upon you.” The man’s face was pale and his body was becoming less distinct. However, he gave a hearty laugh and, without hesitation pressed the glowing Immortal Shows the Way into Meng Hao’s forehead. Such an object could cause countless experts among the stars to engage in ruthless struggle, but the man handed it directly over. The glow of it fused into Meng Hao’s body.

Meng Hao trembled, and closed his eyes for a while. When he opened them, he felt completely different than before. However, he couldn’t quite

tell what was different. The only thing he was sure of was that his head felt much clearer.

“The second boon I will bestow upon you is something you’ve likely heard of before: one of the three classic scriptures, the Dao Divinity Scripture! Sublime Spirit, Dao Divinity, Heaven Severing. These three scriptures aren’t just passed down on this planet where you reside. These three classic scriptures are handed down throughout all the Nine Mountains and Seas!

“Unfortunately, what most people possess are mere fragments of the full scriptures. Up till now, only two people have ever been able to collect the full text of any one of them, and been able to acquire the Dao Realm title. One of those was the Dao Divinity of the First Mountain!

“The other was Sublime Spirit from your Ninth Mountain!

“Only these two powerful experts were able to collect the complete Sublime Spirit Scripture and Dao Divinity Scripture respectively. Everyone else only possesses fragments. As for the most mysterious of all, the Heaven Severing Scripture, for countless ages no one has ever been able to collect it in its entirety, nor cultivated the great circle of that realm to acquire the designation Heaven Severing.

“As for my Dao Divinity Scripture, I only have one manual, which is actually far more valuable than the rest. Mine is the Divine Sense Manual! One of the main reasons why I didn’t die in the Dao War was because of this manual.

“My Divine Sense is about three times more powerful than anyone in the same stage as me. This... is the superiority which comes from cultivating this manual of the Dao Divinity Scripture. Triple is the limit; however, if you acquire other Dao Divinity fragments, then you can increase that number!

“This art, I pass to you!” The man raised his right hand and pushed down onto Meng Hao’s forehead. Immediately, a scriptural text began to float in Meng Hao’s mind. Each magical symbol radiated a black glow as it branded itself onto Meng Hao’s mind. Immediately, his body trembled as

his Spiritual Sense experienced frenzied growth.

After the space of a few breaths passed, he found that his Spiritual Sense had increased by about double. As of this moment, he could easily send it out to cover everything around.

The stronger one's Spiritual Sense is, the stronger the Core Qi will be. With Core Qi powering magical techniques, the result will be even more shocking; similarly, Meng Hao's ability to deduce the ultimate form of his techniques far surpassed others.

At the moment, it was only a simple branding, and Meng Hao had only received a doubling of Spiritual Sense. Through continued cultivation, that increase would be even greater.

Even this seemed like a huge stroke of luck to Meng Hao, though, and left him breathing heavily.

"What do you think?" laughed the man. "Just having it branded to you increased your Spiritual Sense by double. That's because of the half dragon you ate. The power of White Dragons stems from Divine Sense. Your Cultivation base isn't capable of completely assimilating it, though. That will take some time. When that happens, your Divine Sense will become vastly more stable."

"White Dragon...." said Meng Hao without thinking. "You mean that wasn't an illusion?" Feeling the increase in his Spiritual Sense caused him to be vastly more confident in being able to reach Core Formation.

"Who said it was an illusion!?" said the man as he glared, reached up and smacked Meng Hao's head. "You gluttonous little punk! That was the last dried White Dragon that I had saved up. Its efficacy was rather low, but I still had planned to save it for my last meal before I died. Unfortunately, I gave you an entire half! Oh well, it doesn't matter."

The man seemed to be a bit jealous at the level of Meng Hao's luck. He sighed and then reached into his robe. "Alright, I didn't finish what I was saying. You have the first and second boons. Now, I'll give the last boon.... Kid, I want you to remember something. If you aren't able to deliver my legacy back to Planet Tiger Cage, then even if I'm dead I will definitely

curse you!” From within his body, he dragged out a glowing white globule.

The glow carried with it a faint, delicate fragrance. Meng Hao gaped when he saw it; the glow contained something that looked like a slice of a water chestnut.

“This is....”

“This is my legacy,” he said with a whisper, “contained in a breath of my Immortal Qi. This is what you must take to Planet Tiger Cage. Dissolve the Immortal Qi, and you will be able to see the legacy. Only you! If you wish to study it, you may. Just get it to Planet Tiger Cage!

“To be honest, though, according to my calculations, it would be difficult for you to fully assimilate it within several hundred years.” Looking pained, he took the white water chestnut and pushed it into Meng Hao’s chest.

Meng Hao’s body spasmed. The white water chestnut suddenly appeared amidst his ten Dao Pillars. The white glow emanated out, connecting with his Dao Pillars.

At the same time, a boundless roar filled his Cultivation base, exploding outward throughout his body. His ten Dao Pillars shook and radiated massive amounts of violet Qi, which then interlocked over the the white water chestnut. Meng Hao’s mind spun. He suddenly sensed a feeling that was similar to when he had consumed the Three Mortalities Pill in his attempt to reach Core Formation.

“I’m... approaching Core Formation!” Meng Hao said, panting.

The man’s body began to fade, causing him to speak in a rush: “You’ve reached the critical point leading to Core Formation. Dissipate some of my Immortal Qi, and it will help you to form your Core.... Look out for yourself. I’m placing all of my hope in you. Be careful of the Black Sieve Sect. Be careful of the ancient power which comes from the East in this planet. The Lord who controls that power has already reached the pinnacle of this planet.

“The uniqueness of your bloodline and my speculations regarding your

past are contained in that breath of Immortal Qi. Some years from now, after you completely dissolve my Immortal Qi, you will be able to see. However, I can't guarantee that all of it will be true....” The world around them began to crack and break. “I'm gonna make one last bet by entering your planet's Rebirth Cave. According to my analysis, the mysteries within have something to do with the Dao Sea beneath the Ninth Mountain. Look out.... yourself.... mental realm is collapsing. When it... everyone inside will be teleported out....” The voice came and went in spurts, and then finally disappeared. An intense rumbling filled the area around Meng Hao, and then... everything collapsed.

He was once again surrounded by walls. However, this time, the walls were filled with fissures.

Cracking sounds filled the air. Meng Hao looked around and took a deep breath. Everything had happened too quickly just now. As he thought back to it, it seemed like a dream. And yet, the Dao Divinity Scripture was there in his mind, and within his body was the Immortal Qi in the shape of a water chestnut. It was all real.

Furthermore, his ten Dao Pillars were rapidly beginning to melt, releasing an unprecedentedly dense violet Qi. The Qi wrapped around the water chestnut, and was slowly beginning to take the shape of a Core.

Meng Hao knew that he was now entering Core Formation. The process would normally take a very long time; however, because of the assistance of the Immortal Qi, the process would be sped up. Right now, he had reached a critical juncture!

It was at this exact moment that a boom filled the air. The sound came from a nearby wall, which suddenly exploded. A potent Qi suddenly poured through.

“Finally found it,” said a voice. “This is the place the Patriarch spoke of. That person's Immortal will is slumbering in this... eh?” The young man surnamed Ji suddenly appeared, a look of surprise on his face. He wore a long, azure robe.

His eyes flickered as they fell upon Meng Hao. A mysterious light glowed

therein. His expression suddenly turned grim. “Did you steal it?” he asked.

*

1. Choumen Tai’s name in Chinese is 丑門台 chǒu mén tái – This is a bit of a strange name. Choumen is a made up surname. As for the meaning of this name, each of these characters has multiple definitions. Instead of listing them here, I will just put links so that you can research it yourself if you wish. Chou, men, tai.
2. This happened back in [chapter 59](#).

Chapter 302: Crisis!

The Ji youth's expression was one of unyielding pride, his words aloof and remote. He didn't seem to think Meng Hao was even worth looking at, and spoke to him as he might a servant.

Meng Hao frowned. However, he thought of the fearsomeness of the Clan, as well as the fear An Zaihai had shown. He thought about everything he had experienced, and all the stories regarding Ji. Then, he immediately suppressed any feelings of displeasure he felt.

Now was not the appropriate time to attack; his Cultivation base had reached a critical juncture, the time when the important transformation would occur. Meng Hao knew that to attack now would affect the growth of his Cultivation base.

Furthermore, the Ji youth's Cultivation base was at the peak of the early Core Formation stage, even higher than the azure-masked Cultivator from the Black Lands he had fought.

"Your excellency, I'm not quite sure what you mean," said Meng Hao, looking surprised. "I just arrived here myself, and haven't been able to find anything. Don't tell me there's some sort of treasure here?" The glow of greed shone in his eyes as he spoke.

The Ji youth's eyes glittered as he glanced at Meng Hao, and an expression of utter disdain covering his face. He looked around, heart still filled with suspicion.

"This guy's Cultivation base is at the Foundation Establishment level," he thought. "No matter how weak the Immortal is, there's no way this guy could penetrate his Immortal Sense. Plus, he's slumbering. Even I couldn't forcibly break into the Immortal Sense, not even with the device given to me by the Patriarch. So, could it have been taken earlier by someone else?" Within the Ji youth's mind appeared the image of the girl surnamed Fang. He glanced over at Meng Hao. "Did you encounter anyone on your way here? Whatever it is you saw, tell me immediately," he demanded. "If you leave out anything, I will wipe you and your Sect and Clan!" He made no

attempt to cover over his disdain and superciliousness.

Meng Hao hesitated, then lowered his voice. "Someone else? Yes, I did see someone, actually, wearing a green robe. I couldn't really see clearly which Fellow Daoist... it was... This place...."

Before he could finish, the Ji youth seemed to have made his mind up. He flicked his sleeve impatiently. "Screw off!" he said.

Meng Hao's eyes flickered with an imperceptible coldness. However, a cowardly look appeared on his face, and he immediately backed up, then turned to leave.

It was at this exact moment that suddenly, the wall next to him exploded outward, and a person in green emerged.

Along with this person came an incredibly potent Qi, which immediately enveloped the entire area. Not only did it contain power, but also feeling of extreme conceit.

As the Qi roiled out, the figure emerged slowly, a young woman. This was none other than the girl surnamed Fang, who was also from the Eastern Lands. As soon as she appeared, her eyes fell onto the Ji youth.

Meng Hao was standing right next to her, but she completely ignored him. The arrogance which emanated from her was virtually palpable.

"Ji Hongdong, give the Immortal's scripture to me!" said the young woman coolly. She was beautiful, and emanated icy arrogance.¹

When he saw the girl appear, Meng Hao's heart began to thump, and he backed up a few paces. Before he could get very far, the Ji youth's eyes narrowed.

"Fang Yu, it turns out you took the Immortal's scripture, and still...." He only finished half of his thought when his heart suddenly trembled. He abruptly looked at Meng Hao, and as he did, he blinked his right eye seven times in rapid succession. Suddenly, two pupils could be seen within his eye. They seemed to possess some power of psychic sight! As he looked at Meng Hao, he immediately was able to see the white water chestnut in

Meng Hao's dantian. ²

In addition to the water chestnut, there was a blurriness. Even the water chestnut by itself was enough to cause killing intent to spring out from the Ji youth's eyes. However, just as soon as it appeared, it then vanished.

The speed with which all of this happened was such that if you blinked, you wouldn't be able to pick up even the slightest clue that something was happening.

"Preposterous!" said the Ji youth with a cold laugh. Ignoring Meng Hao, he immediately shot toward Fang Yu. As he neared, he waved his right hand, causing a field of stars to appear behind him. Fang Yu gave a cold snort and also advanced. She lifted her hand, forming a fist and punching out into the air. A huge boom resonated out in all directions.

Meng Hao immediately tumbled backward, then picked a random direction and sped off.

His face was grim. He could see that Ji Hongdong had seen through him; he didn't point it out and immediately pursue Meng Hao because of the Fang girl. Instead of saying something, he planned to come after Meng Hao later, alone.

The walls continued to fill with cracks, although Meng wasn't sure how long it would take until they completely crumbled. He slapped his bag of holding to retrieve the good luck charm. He pressed down on it, after which a frustrated look appeared on his face.

For the first time ever, the good luck charm was powerless to teleport him away.

"I can't place all of my hope on the collapse of this place...." thought Meng Hao. He knew full well that before the place fell to pieces, he had somewhat of a chance to flee. However, once the collapse was complete, if Ji Hongdong came after him, he would be in a very bad position.

Ji Hongdong's status, his place in the fearsome Ji Clan, made it such that if he were killed, it would be equivalent to deliberately invoking monolithic disaster. Meng Hao wasn't sure if the Violet Fate Sect would

even be able to fight back. The two powers weren't even on the same level.

His face grim, Meng Hao continued on for a bit less time than it takes half an incense stick to burn. Finally, he gritted his teeth and stopped, sitting down cross-legged on the ground. Ignoring the crumbling of the walls around him, he began to meditate, rotating his Cultivation base and pushing as fast as possible toward Core Formation.

"Regardless of anything, I will only be able to seize the initiative... after I reach Core Formation!" A bright glow appeared in his eyes. This was a moment of crisis, leaving him little time to think things through. He closed his eyes and spit out a mouthful of mist, which immediately crackled with lightning as it surrounded him. At the same time, a halo the color of blood emerged from Meng Hao, and a Blood Clone materialised and began to guard over him.

Meng Hao's ten Dao Pillars emitted a roaring sound that only he could hear. Massive amounts of violet Qi poured forth, causing the Dao Pillars to begin to melt and then merge together.

After the Dao Pillars fully melted he would be able to form his Core. Thanks to the Immortal Qi, this process would happen much more quickly. Once Meng Hao reached Core Formation, he would set the record as the fastest person to do so since ancient times.

Time passed by. Meng Hao wasn't sure when Ji Hongdong would come for him. However, it would happen quickly, he was sure of that. Ji Hongdong had picked up on the clues. Once he shook off the young Fang woman, he would be coming for Meng Hao.

"Must go faster!!" thought Meng Hao, circulating all the power within his Cultivation base. Suddenly, a shocking roar filled his mind. His tenth Dao Pillar was now melting.

As the Dao Pillar melted, vast quantities of violet Qi poured out, wrapping around and around the collection of violet mist which already existed around the Immortal Qi. The globule of violet mist rotated rapidly, emitting countless strands of violet Qi throughout Meng Hao's body.

A brutally powerful Qi appeared within Meng Hao; his physical body

grew more powerful, his Spiritual Sense expanded, and most obviously, the Blood Clone and the Blood Death World he was within slowly began to grow stronger.

As the true self grew stronger, so did they!

Meng Hao wasn't satisfied, though. The speed was too slow. Veins bulged on his face as he pushed everything into rotating his Cultivation base. Amidst the roaring, his ninth Dao Pillar began to melt. More violet Qi poured out. The violet mist globule rotated even more rapidly; it was now showing signs of condensing into a Core.

Next, his eighth Dao Pillar, then his seventh. They melted one after another, filling him with rumbling booms. Boundless spiritual energy exploded out, causing the violet mist to roil at even greater speed. It sucked in violet Qi. As of this moment, Meng Hao's body was emitting a bright violet glow.

The globule of violet mist spun at high speed. All signs pointed to it forming into a Violet Core at any moment. Seeing this, Meng Hao quickly consumed a large amount of Three Mortalities Pills. It still wasn't enough. Meng Hao could clearly sense that he was... immeasurably close to Core Formation!

"Even faster!" thought Meng Hao with an inward growl. A thunderous noise could be heard as his sixth Dao Pillar, fifth Dao Pillar and fourth Dao Pill all melted. It was at this time that off in the distance, Meng Hao could hear a loud noise; someone was using a magical technique.

"It's not Ji Hongdong..." thought Meng Hao. He was focused on rotating his Dao Pillars, but he had long since sent his Spiritual Sense out into the area. He immediately caught sight of a figure making its way toward him at high speed.

Meng Hao sighed inwardly and opened his eyes. Off in the distance was Li Daoyi, wearing a thoughtful smile.

Catching sight of Meng Hao, he gave a slight smile and said, "I was wondering who it was that Fellow Daoist Ji wanted me to pursue and delay. So, it turns out it's Grandmaster Fang Mu." He slowly approached.

As he neared, he suddenly stopped and gaped at Meng Hao. “Core Formation Qi? You picked this moment to form your Core?” He laughed, his expression filled with a sneer.

“You really live up to your reputation, Grandmaster Fang Mu,” he said. “Very audacious! However, you took something that belongs to Fellow Daoist Ji. That’s a no-no. The mere sight of you fills me with the desire to kill.”

“Make a move against me and you’ll cause a war between the Li Clan and the Violet Fate Sect,” said Meng Hao coolly, his expression the same as ever. He was in a race against time; his Cultivation base was rotating rapidly, causing his remaining three Dao Pillars to begin to melt away.

“I would of course never attack you,” said Li Daoyi with a hypocritical smile. “I’ll just block your way, make sure you stay behind and don’t leave. Your life does not belong to me, but rather, Fellow Daoist Ji. The Clan Patriarchs will be more than happy to allow something like this to happen.” He lifted his hand, extending it toward Meng Hao’s forehead.

Meng Hao sighed. It seemed he would not be able to make his breakthrough at the moment. Killing intent glittered in his eyes, and he was just about to make a move, when suddenly, his face flickered.

At the same time, Li Daoyi’s face also changed. He spun, and then dodged to the side.

Just as he did, a clear, melodious snort rang out, filling the air. A band of white light flashed through the spot where Li Daoyi had just stood, then shot after him.

Next, a prismatic beam shot toward them, coming to a stop next to Meng Hao.

There, wearing a white robe, facial expression icy cold, was Xu Qing.

She glared at Li Daoyi.

“Make your breakthrough,” she said calmly to Meng Hao. “I’ll take care of him.” Her voice was cold, but as her words made their way into Meng Hao’s heart, they transformed into gentle warmth.

1. Ji Hongdong's name in Chinese is 季鸿东 jì hóng dōng – Ji is a family name. Hong means “great” and also “goose.” Dong means “east”.
2. Fang Yu's name in Chinese is 方瑜 fāng yú – Fang is a family name. Yu means “beauty” or “jade”.

Chapter 303: The Bloodline of the Ji Clan

“Xu Qing!” Li Daoyi’s eyes glowed brightly. He was not unfamiliar with Xu Qing; back in the western region of the Southern Domain, he had fought against her.

During that fight, he had suffered a great defeat!

Later, he was able to make a breakthrough and enter the Core Formation stage, but the loss that day had been extremely irritating. Seeing Xu Qing again now caused his eyes to fill with coldness. Killing intent flickered inside of him, and he lifted his hand. Power of Core Formation emanated out.

Xu Qing’s expression never changed from being cold. Her eyes glittered as a white colored Qi emanated out from her body, transforming into threads which shot toward Li Daoyi.

A boom echoed out immediately. Meng Hao’s eyes were closed, and he was completely focused on rotating his Cultivation base. His third Dao Pillar began to melt, sending violet Qi surging through his body, permeating it. Meng Hao’s entire body was now violet-colored.

Xu Qing and Li Daoyi were locked in a magical battle. Xu Qing obviously had the upper hand; in reality, in terms of Cultivation base, she had fused with Matriarch Phoenix, making it impossible for Li Daoyi to even compare to her. She was essentially at the level of a Sect Patriarch.

However, even if Xu Qing actively attempted to meld, she would be unable to do so in a short period of time. Currently, she was only able to wield about one percent of the full power. Even that small amount still placed her above Li Daoyi.

No matter what methods Li Daoyi employed as they fought, Xu Qing’s expression was the same as ever. Were she able to leave Meng Hao’s side, to pursue Li Daoyi and use all the magical techniques she possessed, then she would easily be able to defeat him.

However, she didn’t want to take such a risk. She was worried that if she

fully engaged in the battle, Li Daoyi would use some trick or another to affect Meng Hao's Cultivation base.

As the two of them fought, Meng Hao's second Dao Pillar began to melt, and after it disappeared, the first. In the space of ten breaths, the Flying Rain-Dragon Core was visible in his Core Sea. It immediately moved into the violet mist.

The Demonic Core was already small; after merging into the violet mist, the mist globule began to rotate even faster. It was very obviously congealing into a Core at this point.

It was at this very moment that Ji Hongdong appeared off in the distance, flying in their general direction at high speed. His eyes were actually closed, as if he were following a Qi trail.

His face was pale; obviously he had been injured while battling with the young Fang woman. Having shaken her off, here he was now, an intense light glittering underneath his eyelids.

"I'm not sure how that lowbrow Cultivator managed to pierce the Immortal Sense and acquire the Immortal Qi that the Patriarch talked about. Well, it doesn't matter. With his Cultivation base, he won't be able to absorb it very quickly. As long as I'm able to kill him, then I can take the Immortal Qi and absorb it myself. Once I do, then I'll definitely be able to be promoted out of the Quasi-Array. Then I can be a true member of the Clan Array!" As he reached this point in his train of thought, he opened his eyes. They gleamed with intense anticipation.

He suddenly turned his head and looked toward Meng Hao. "Found you!" he said, flying directly toward him.

As for Meng Hao, cracking sounds could be heard within his body. The violet mist globule within his Core Sea was shrinking. As it did, it began to grow more solid; it emanated a brilliant violet light as a thick exterior began to form.

Once it was completely solid, the Violet Core formed, then Meng Hao's Cultivation base would rocket up. He would leave Foundation Establishment and enter Core Formation, and the ranks of the truly

powerful experts!

Ten percent, twenty percent, thirty percent.... The rotation of the violet mist globule inside of him began to slow, and looked more and more solid. It was shrinking also; all that remained was about the size of a fist.

It didn't take long before the Violet Core truly began to emerge. As of now, Meng Hao could feel a throbbing power pulsing through him; far, far greater than anything he had felt before.

This was not a normal Violet Core, but one formed from the ten Dao Pillars of a Perfect Foundation. The moment it appeared, it became the most powerful Violet Core ever seen in the tens of thousands of years that made up the history of the Violet Fate Sect.

This level of power was unheard of. Furthermore, after merging with the Demonic Core of the Flying Rain-Dragon, the Violet Core was even more brutally powerful.

No one in the Violet Fate Sect had even come close to touching such a level of power; even Reverend Violet East, when he was in the Core Formation Stage, had never reached this astonishing level.

In addition to all that... Meng Hao's Violet Core was formed with the assistance of the breath of Immortal Qi. This Core... was something that had never been seen in the Violet Fate Sect, the Southern Domain, the Western Desert, the Northern Desert or the Eastern Lands!

Forty percent, fifty percent, sixty percent.... Meng Hao could sense the Qi of the violet mist within him growing stronger. His heart began to beat faster, his body grew stronger, the range of the Spiritual Sense grew greater. He could sense all these constant changes.

It was at this moment that Meng Hao suddenly caught sight of Ji Hongdong with his Spiritual Sense. He approached rapidly; in one breath, he was far off in the distance, a moment later he was upon Meng Hao and the others.

At the same time that Ji Hongdong appeared, a boom filled the air. Li Daoyi coughed up some blood as he staggered back several paces to stand

next to Ji Hongdong. He glared at Xu Qing, his eyes full of murder.

Xu Qing's face was a bit pale, but her expression was cold as she stared at Ji Hongdong.

"Excellent job, Li Daoyi," said Ji Hongdong coolly. "I will notify my Clan regarding this matter, and tell them that your Li Clan performed a meritorious deed."

"Please don't be so polite, young master Ji. It is my honor to be able to assist the Ji Clan. Young master Ji, please allow me to take this woman away. She has attacked me twice so far, and today I plan to help her understand what it means to live a life worse than death!" A vile, licentious look shone in his eyes. He liked cold women like this.

"Do as you wish," replied Ji Hongdong coolly. He glanced at Xu Qing, then looked at Meng Hao, who was still sitting there cross-legged, meditating.

Looking at his Cultivation base, and seeing that he was forming his Core, caused a look of derision to appear in his eyes.

"If Fang Yu hadn't appeared, I might have been fooled by you. Since you have the Immortal Qi in your body, then I have no choice but to slay you and refine it out of your corpse." With that, he took a step forward. A massive power emerged from his body. An image appeared behind him, that of mountains and rivers and a great land. It was a strange scene; it made it seem as if he were an emperor, and that the land he stepped on was part of his empire.

As he proceeded forward, the violet mist within Meng Hao reached eighty percent completion, and headed toward ninety percent. The powerful Qi within him didn't emanate out from him at all. Instead, it surged throughout his body, filling him.

Xu Qing set her gaze, and then stepped in front of Meng Hao to block Ji Hongdong's way.

"You overestimate yourself!" said Ji Hongdong with a cold snort. He took another step, and the massive image behind him of the mountains and

rivers suddenly expanded, exerting pressure down into Xu Qing.

This was the manifestation of Ji Hongdong's Core Qi. The mountains and rivers made him seem like an emperor exuding a royal aura. Xu Qing's face went pale under the pressure; her eyes suddenly shined with a blackness that completely covered over the whites of her eyes. Anyone who looked at her eyes now would see only dark emptiness.

Suddenly, the Qi emanating from her body was no longer white, but black. Strands of black Qi emerged, transforming into a host of vicious, demonic faces. The faces congealed together above her face to form into... a black phoenix!

It immediately charged directly toward the royal will embodied by the mountains and rivers.

Ji Hongdong's eyes narrowed, shocked by what had just happened. A boom rattled out, and blood sprayed from Xu Qing's mouth. She staggered backward, then grabbed Meng Hao. It was the same way she had grabbed him all those years ago when she took him from Mount Daqing.¹ Holding him at her side, she shot off into the distance.

Her face was pale, and blood seeped from the corners of her mouth. Just now, she had used the power of Matriarch Phoenix, a power which did not fully belong to her; as a result, she had significantly injured herself.

She was willing to take the risk, but in truth, she could not employ too much of the power, only a bit of it.

At the same time as she sped away with Meng Hao, Ji Hongdong, his face pale white, looked down and pulled a damaged jade pendant out from near his chest.

His face was unsightly, his eyes filled with killing intent as well as astonishment.

"Just now, she erupted with power similar to that of a Nascent Soul Cultivation base. She even crushed my life-saving jade.... This girl's Qi... is interesting. It must be the power of a discarnate soul. Now I just have to see which discarnate soul of the Southern Domain dares to take shape

before me, Ji Hongdong of the Ji Clan. Who is it exactly that dares to attack me!?” A cruel smile twisted his face as he shot forward in pursuit.

Li Daoyi followed him, sighing inwardly. Now he knew that Xu Qing hadn't been using her full power during their fight. If she had, he would without a doubt be dead already.

“Obviously, she didn't use her full power when she attacked just now. That would cost her too much....”

Meng Hao couldn't physically see what was happening, but because of his Spiritual Sense, he was aware of all the changes in the situation. In fact, things were even clearer than if he had seen it with the naked eye. He saw Xu Qing's blood, saw her risking her life.

He felt a stab of pain in his heart, and waves of anger surged up in his heart. By the time she coughed up blood for the third time, the violet mist inside of Meng Hao was ninety percent complete and closing in on one hundred percent.

“Elder Sister,” he said, opening his eyes. “Put me down, okay?”

Xu Qing didn't say anything. She ignored him, speeding forward as quickly as possible.

He looked her, warmth filling his eyes.

Suddenly, a whistling sound could be heard as Ji Hongdong appeared, flying through the air. By now, the walls in the area were more than half crumbled to pieces. It wouldn't be long before they completely disintegrated.

When Ji Hongdong appeared, a look of determination appeared in Xu Qing's eyes. She waved her left hand, and her body trembled as massive amounts of black Qi shot out, forming into the shape of a black phoenix, filled with countless discarnate souls. Shrill screams filled the air as it shot toward Ji Hongdong.

“Are you blind?!” said Ji Hongdong with a cold snort. “Do you really dare to offend the bloodline of the Ji Clan?!” He continued forward without hesitation.

*

1. This, of course, happened in chapter 1.

Chapter 304: Core Formation!!

By the time the words left Ji Hongdong's mouth, the phoenix, formed from black Qi and countless discarnate souls, was around twenty to twenty five meters away from him. Suddenly, it began to tremble.

The previously vicious faces of the discarnate souls were suddenly filled with dread and shock, as if they had suddenly encountered something they found terrifying.

The black Qi phoenix emitted a shrill scream, as if it didn't want to proceed any further forward. It lowered its head, almost like it was bowing to Ji Hongdong.

The expression on Xu Qing's face immediately changed. She began to tremble, and her eyes filled with disbelief. How could she possibly have predicted that the discarnate souls of the Black Sieve Sect, who were as powerful as the sun at high noon, would prostrate before a Core Formation Cultivator?

"Your bloodline...." Her heart thumped as she suddenly considered the words Ji Hongdong had just spoken.

Ji Hongdong gave a cold harumph, and once again spoke: "Trifling discarnate souls! In front of the bloodline of the Ji Clan, they don't even count as wild dogs. They're nothing but insects. When they died, they died under the Heavens of the Ji Clan!" His words were cool, his countenance proud. He never stopped moving forward; as he did, the discarnate souls shrieked. They retreated backward, prostrating, their faces filled with looks of entreaty.

The black phoenix trembled violently as Ji Hongdong approached, and suddenly, a face appeared on its surface.

It was the face of a woman. This was not Xu Qing's face, but rather the sealed Matriarch Phoenix!

Her eyes were closed, and her expression was one of terror, and even more so, imploring. She wanted to offer an explanation, but it seemed she

had lost her power to speak or even open her eyes. Slowly, a bright red sealing mark appeared on her face.

When Ji Hongdong saw the face, he blinked seven times. A bizarre light shone out as he studied her. A strange expression appeared on his face, and then he laughed.

“Interesting,” he said, with a meaningful smile. “I’ve heard of discarnate souls possessing people, but I’ve never heard of a host taking control of the discarnate soul.” He looked at Li Daoyi. “What is her name and Sect?”

“Black Sieve Sect, Xu Qing!” replied Li Daoyi immediately.

“Xu Qing. Interesting,” he said, a wicked smile on his face. “I’m not sure how you did it. You fooled the Black Sieve Sect, as well as the other discarnate souls. You’ve fooled everyone into thinking that you are the discarnate soul. Tell me, if word of this gets out, what would happen to you?” He proceeded forward, laughing loudly. He waved his right hand, and all the discarnate souls retreated, even the black phoenix. Trembling, they didn’t dare to proceed any further forward.

They weren’t necessarily afraid of the young man in particular, but rather the fearsome bloodline of the Ji Clan inside of him!

Xu Qing’s face changed even more, becoming even paler. She well knew that if word spread, she wouldn’t be able to flee far enough. She would be dead without doubt. It wouldn’t just be the Black Sieve Sect that was chasing her, but all the fearsome discarnate souls.

Whether it be the Cultivators who lived on the surface of the Black Sieve Sect, or the discarnate souls beneath, not a single one would let her go free. There would be nowhere to flee to in the entire Southern Domain. All of her resources in the Sect would be purged. No shelter would be found anywhere in the Southern Domain. Besides, even if she fled, she couldn’t physically stay away for very long. The process of fusing with Matriarch Phoenix could only happen within the Black Sieve Sect.

It was only there that she could continue the process. Until Matriarch Phoenix was completely swallowed up, if she stayed away from the Sect for too long at one time, then her Cultivation base would begin to deteriorate.

This matter had suddenly turned into a great disaster for her.

Seeing Xu Qing's change of expression caused Ji Hongdong to laugh. His eyes filled with derision; he loved seeing people like this. It gave him a feeling of power, as if he were a great lord. "And then there's this seal..." he said. "It's very interesting. It can help you control the discarnate soul. I think the Sect Patriarchs will be very interested in this." He laughed as he approached, his face filled with derision, as if everything was under his control.

Xu Qing's face was pale. Having temporarily lost control of the discarnate souls, and without the power of Matriarch Phoenix, she was just an ordinary Cultivator. Even the power of Core Formation could only be wielded by her with difficulty.

Furthermore, she couldn't retreat. She suddenly felt a binding around her, holding her in place as if she were being sealed. She couldn't move even an inch.

"Don't worry, I'm not going to kill you," said Ji Hongdong. He neared lifting his hand toward Meng Hao to grab him.

Even as his hand closed in, Meng Hao's eyes snapped open. A frightening power surged out from his Cultivation base. It ripped through the area like an invisible cyclone, causing Ji Hongdong's face to twist. He retreated backward immediately, nearly thirty meters. His face was dark, and his pupils had constricted.

Next to him, Li Daoyi's expression was one of astonishment, disbelief and alarm. Body trembling, he stared at Meng Hao's figure within the cyclone, and a look of venom and shock filled his eyes. He suddenly said, "You're... you're... you're not Fang Mu! You're Meng Hao!!" His voice was shrill, and his breath came in pants. How could he ever have imagined that the person he had searched in vain for throughout all these years, was actually right in front of him!!

As the words left his mouth, thunderous roars filled the air, and the violent winds surged outward. Meng Hao's figure seemed to surge upward. He was the nucleus of the cyclone; the terrifying winds were coming out

from his body.

Meng Hao's face suddenly changed. No longer was it Fang Mu's, but rather, his own face, his original face. An intensely terrifying Qi suddenly shot up from within him.

Li Daoyi's face went pale. His mind was reeling; he just couldn't believe what was happening. However, how could he not understand that Fang Mu was Meng Hao, and Meng Hao was Fang Mu!

"Violet Fate Sect Legacy Apprentice, Grandmaster Pill Cauldron, Fang Mu, Meng Hao...." He retreated backward, thinking about the pain he had experienced when he lost his arm. It had been restored, but the enmity created in the Blood Immortal Legacy tournament was something he considered to be the greatest humiliation in his entire life.

Surrounding by a violet glow, a profound look filled Meng Hao's eyes. Other than him, no one could know the reason for why he had just switched to his original appearance....

His eyes glowed with coldness. Within him was a Violet Core, about the size of a child's fist. It rested in the position once occupied by his Core Sea, floating there, rotating. Every time it spun in a full circle, vast quantities of violet-colored strands surged out like lightning to every corner of his body.

The violet-colored strands flickered as they surged through his Qi passageways, filled with a boundless Cultivation base power that far exceeded Foundation Establishment. This was Core Formation Qi, from a Core Formation Cultivation base!

In fact, this Core Formation Qi was not the type of Qi that would be emitted by a Cultivation base that had just entered the Core Formation stage. This was the explosive power of the pinnacle of the early Core Formation stage.

The violet wind screamed as it spun throughout the area. Even Meng Hao's long hair was now violet as it whipped around his head. Next to him, Xu Qing sighed; it seemed she had thought of something. Her face changed, and she was about to speak when Meng Hao suddenly

interrupted.

“Don’t worry, I’ll take care of it,” he said, his voice light. He turned, his eyes glowing with a violet light as he looked at Ji Hongdong.

Ji Hongdong’s expression was the same as usual. “Fang Mu? Meng Hao? It seems you have quite a few identities. Considering how quickly you entered Core Formation, it also seems that the breath of Immortal Qi really is incredibly valuable. That makes me happy.” He smiled, lifting up his arm and then flicking his sleeve. Suddenly, a field of stars appeared behind him.

The starfield was large, filling the air. It rushed toward Meng Hao, exerting a suppressive force. It was clear that this field of stars was that which shined above the Southern Domain, including the Western Desert and the Eastern Lands. It was vast and mighty.

As it approached, it enveloped everything, making it impossible for anyone to avoid it.

Meng Hao lifted his head, his expression a bit blank. He was silent, almost as if he didn’t notice the starfield approaching him. As it descended, the blankness on his face disappeared, replaced instead with determination.

As of now, a decision had been made!

He lifted his hand, forming a fist. A red glow suddenly shot out; this was the Blood Death World. It slammed into the starfield.

An explosion filled the air, and Meng Hao tumbled backward like a kite with its string cut.

“Fool! You....” said Ji Hongdong with a cold laugh, his voice filled with contempt. However, before he could finish speaking, Meng Hao’s tumbling body suddenly changed direction. It was with indescribable speed, before anyone could react, that he suddenly appeared directly in front of Li Daoyi. Li Daoyi had been on guard the entire time, but he was still incapable of evading.

Actually, Meng Hao’s initial goal this entire time had been Li Daoyi.

After all, he would be the easiest to exterminate, no matter how prepared he was.

Li Daoyi's pupils constricted; he was about to shoot backward when Meng Hao lifted his right hand and pushed it down onto Li Daoyi's forehead. A boom filled the air, and an exterminating power poured into Li Daoyi's body, filling him, crushing him, mangling him. He was dead instantly.

"Did you pay attention to the face of the person who killed you?" he asked softly, looking at Li Daoyi's bloody corpse. He turned to look at Ji Hongdong.

Meng Hao sighed, then slapped his bag of holding to retrieve his East Pill Division identification medallion. He looked down at it for a long moment, his eyes filled with a complicated, disconsolate look. Finally, determination filled his eyes and he... crushed it.

The instant he crushed the medallion, his Violet Furnace Lord's robe began to disintegrate. A green robe now covered his body.

As of this moment, he was no longer Fang Mu, Legacy Apprentice of the East Pill Division. Now... he was Meng Hao from Mount Daqing in the State of Zhao!

Chapter 305: Do You Dare to Kill Me!?

The instant Meng Hao crushed the Violet Furnace Lord medallion, the moment his Violet Furnace Lord robe began to fade away, something happened in the State of Eastern Emergence, Violet Fate Sect, East Pill Division, on Grandmaster Pill Demon's low mountain.

In one particular building were three racks of jade slips.

On the third rack were nine jade slips. Upon each slip was written a name, and if you looked closely, you would see that they belonged to the nine great Furnace Lords, An Zaihai, Ye Feimu, and the others. These were all of Pill Demon's novitiates.

There was only one jade slip on the second rack. This one belonged to Chu Yuyan, his Personal Apprentice.

The first rack also contained one jade slip, upon which was written two characters. Fang Mu!

His position was the highest. Legacy Apprentice. This jade slip represented the importance of Meng Hao's place in the East Pill Division of the Violet Fate Sect. Suddenly, Fang Mu's jade slip began to tremble. Cracking sounds rang out, and fissures sprang out from the middle of the slip. In an instant... it exploded, transforming into flying ash.

The moment the jade slip collapsed, white-robed Pill Demon was sitting cross-legged on the mountain's peak, looking off into the distance. A tremor ran through his body. He turned his head, looking down into the room with the jade slips. He held his gaze for a long time. His ancient face suddenly seemed to grow older; more wrinkles appeared.

Meanwhile, in the center of the Southern Domain, in the middle of the territory of the Li Clan, was a location that appeared to be just like the dwelling place of Immortals. Suddenly, a roar filled the air. Along with the roar appeared a figure bristling with rage.

As the figure charged, out, seven or eight others appeared behind him. The man held a shattered jade slip in his hand. It emitted a bright glow, in

the middle of which was a face... it was none other than that of Meng Hao!

This was the reflection stored in Li Daoyi's pupils the moment before he died. Meng Hao's face.

"Daoyi!!" howled the old man, lifting his head to the sky and letting out a howl. A Dao Child of the Clan had been slain. Such a thing was said to have occurred to the Wang Clan years ago, but it turned out to only be a rumor. Even still, it had shocked the Southern Domain. Now, it really had happened to the Li Clan. This time, it was no falsehood; this Dao Child really had met his death.

"I don't care who you are," the old man raged, "you killed a Dao Child of my Li Clan! No matter which Sect you belong to, you shall die!!" He and the eight figures shot off into the distance. Behind them, even more Cultivators of the Li Clan followed, dozens. They transformed into prismatic beams of light that shot toward the Rebirth Cave at such speed it seemed possible they would tear a hole into the sky.

At the same time, in the Wang Clan of the Southern Domain, deep within that endless chain of mountains, was the lava cave of the tenth Patriarch of the Wang Clan. Suddenly, the lid of his coffin shattered into pieces, and the tenth Wang Clan Patriarch slowly rose to his feet.

He walked into the lava, and as he did, it slowly cooled and grew dark, as did the cave.

"As one of the legendary Wang Clan Patriarchs once said, all living things sow Karma. Therefore, Karma must be reaped. With life, comes death.... Today, I will help you. Yes, it's sowing Karma, but in the future, I will consume you, and that is the reaping of Karma that you must pay. Today, you will not die. However, that merely indicates that in the future, you will belong completely to me." The tenth Wang Clan Patriarch laughed hoarsely as a red glow surrounded his body.

"I haven't been out in so long...." he muttered lightly, then disappeared.

Near the Rebirth Cave, within the mental realm of the Immortal's

corpse, in the depths of the maze, Meng Hao stood next to Li Daoyi's corpse, breathing heavily.

From the moment he had revealed his true features, Meng Hao had been in constant deep thought. Li Daoyi had to die. The instant Meng Hao had heard Ji Hongdong's words, Li Daoyi's fate had been sealed; he must be killed!

Only dead men can truly keep secrets. ¹

Xu Qing had her secret, as did Meng Hao. Were word to get out, Xu Qing would face unspeakable danger to her life.... In fact, her death would be certain.

Therefore, Li Daoyi had to die!

However, there was a polar difference between dying beneath Fang Mu's hand, and dying beneath Meng Hao's.

Meng Hao was no longer the ignorant youth he had been when he first entered the Cultivation world. In his years practicing cultivation in the Violet Fate Sect, his understanding of things had grown exponentially. How could he not understand that the death of a Dao Child of any Sect would instantly be made known to that Sect?

Furthermore, they had techniques to be able to reveal the appearance and Qi of whoever did the slaying. Even determining the exact location where it had happened would not be difficult. It might be possible for the meat jelly to help him cover up the truth from the Li Clan. However... Meng Hao wasn't confident enough to take that risk.

Meng Hao was well aware of the situations, and the ramifications.... Therefore, he could not kill Li Daoyi while wearing the face of Fang Mu.

As such... he had no choice but to discard that identity.

As for Ji Hongdong, Quasi-Array member of the number one Clan in the entire Nanshan Continent, well, if he died, Meng Hao could only imagine what the reaction of the Ji Clan would be. Any powerful and fearsome Clan would take serious action to handle the slaying of one of their Clan members. That was a necessary reaction to maintain the dignity and

power of the Clan.

Killing Ji Hongdong would be like killing the prince of an Empire. An Empire might have many princes, but such a thing would provoke severe catastrophe and endless problems.

The Violet Fate Sect would really have no way to fight back against the Ji Clan. Based on An Zaihai's description, and Meng Hao's personal understanding, although the Violet Fate Sect was a great Clan in the Southern Domain, compared to the Ji Clan, it was like... a tiny mayfly.

If a Violet Fate Sect disciple killed a member of the Ji Clan, that death wouldn't just involve whichever trifling disciple did the killing. Most likely, the entire Sect would collapse because of it.

As Meng Hao's fingers crushed down onto his Violet Furnace Lord medallion, what he was thinking about was his Master. He also thought about the other Violet Furnace Lords. He thought about the green mountains and clear blue waters of the East Pill Division. He thought about all his experiences through the years there.

Despite all that... Ji Hongdong had to die!

If he didn't, Xu Qing would be in incredible danger. Furthermore, if the Ji Clan knew of the existence of a Demon Sealer, well... the mere thought of it caused Meng Hao's scalp to prickle with danger.

Therefore, Ji Hongdong was doomed to perish. Only his death could ensure Xu Qing's safety, and allow her to stay in the Black Sieve Sect and completely fuse with Matriarch Phoenix, without anyone suspecting her.

And so, Meng Hao crushed the Violet Furnace Lord medallion. It represented him casting off all ties with the Violet Fate Sect; he had nothing to do with them now. He was Meng Hao. Fang Mu was merely an alias. Once that information was revealed, the Violet Fate Sect would be able to offer a clear explanation.

Most importantly, destroying the medallion indicated that he was forsaking the Sect. It might even offer implication that Fang Mu was dead.

The only frustrating factor was that when he left this place, the Li Clan

would be after his head. There would be nowhere in the vast Southern Domain where he could hide. He would be forced to leave, to truly disappear from the Southern Domain.

Furthermore, before disappearing, he must prepare for what would surely be a vast series of storm-like upheavals.

All of this had been rushing through his mind the moment Xu Qing's identity was revealed to Ji Hongdong. Despite Meng Hao's breakthrough in Cultivation base, he was still hesitant at first. In the end, though, he was filled with resolve.

"Master," he thought, slowly looking off in the direction of the Violet Fate Sect. "I've been unfilial.... Please view Fang Mu as... dead!" His eyes flashed as he looked back at Ji Hongdong. For the first time, they flickered with killing intent. It takes some time to analyze all of the thoughts that went through Meng Hao's head, but in actuality, they flashed through his head in an instant. As they did, they transformed into intense killing intent.

This killing intent caused Ji Hongdong's mind to tremble. This was the first time he had ever seen someone staring at him in such a way. In the past, it didn't matter where he went or which enemy he fought, people would attack him, but never with the desire to exterminate him.

That was because his surname was Ji. The bloodline of the Ji Clan pumped through his veins. In the Southern Domain, in the Nanshan Continent, few people would ever dare to provoke the Ji Clan!

"You want to kill me? Do you dare?!" His eyes glittered coldly as he lifted his right hand and performed an incantation gesture. Immediately Core Qi blossomed above his head. Again, the starfield appeared. This time, there were clearly far more blinking stars than there had been before. They covered everything above them, filling the area, then rushing down toward Meng Hao.

As the bright starlight descended upon him, Meng Hao's killing intent continued to flicker just as before. The stars approached, and he lifted his right hand, striking forward. As he did, his blood-covered fingers caused

everything to shake. Suddenly, a massive blood-colored palm appeared beneath him.

The bloody palm grew larger, expanding; next the Blood Death World came to being, within which Meng Hao's Blood Clones could be seen. They faced the incoming starlight and starfield, and immediately moved to defend against it.

The Blood Palm shot upward like the hand of a giant, slamming into the starfield.

A boom filled the air. Meng Hao's entire body trembled, and blood oozed from his mouth. The starfield began to collapse, and the starlight dissipated. However, Meng Hao's Blood Death World also began to disintegrate.

At the moment, Meng Hao hadn't yet cultivated Core Qi. Right now, he was now facing up against a Cultivator who had; however, Meng Hao was vastly different than the last time he had done so, against the azure-masked Black Lands Cultivator. He would not flee; no, he was much more evenly matched now.

Ji Hongdong's expression changed; blood sprayed from his mouth and he staggered backward. A fierce expression washed over his face, and he waved his right hand out.

"Other than that damned crazy lunatic from the Fang Clan, you're the first person to ever injure me! Damn you! Dungeon of Heaven; Incarnate Prison!" As he cried out, his hand flashed an incantation gesture and then waved toward the air above Meng Hao. Immediately, a blue glow appeared, spreading out to cover everything. It transformed into... a blue sky complete with white clouds, its own Heaven.

Even stranger, this sky covered Meng Hao only; everywhere else looked just as it had before.

"Let ring the Bell of the East. Nine exterminations; use the will of the Heavens to destroy the body; use the gaze of the firmament to punish the spirit; use the bloodline of the Ji Clan to punish this person with Heavenly Tribulation!" Veins of blood filled Ji Hongdong's eyes. He lowered his

finger, and the blue swath of Heaven above Meng Hao filled with roiling black clouds. Thunder crackled, and even more shockingly, it seemed lightning would soon fall.

“You want to kill me? You’re not qualified!” Ji Hongdong slapped his bag of holding, and a silver bell appeared in his hand. Immediately, a clear ring sounded out.

“Use the bloodline of the Ji Clan and the guidance of the Bell of the East to call forth the judgement of the will of the Heavens against this Meng Hao! DIE!” His face distorted with rage as he let out a roar.

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1. I really wanted to translate this as “Dead men tell no tales”... but it would have been a bit too much of a stretch from the original haha

Chapter 306: Slaying Ji!

As Ji Hondong's words resonated out, the sky above Meng Hao's head began to crackle with lightning. A bolt of lightning as thick as an arm shot down with incredible speed, heading directly toward Meng Hao.

The Violet Core within him rotated rapidly, bursting forth with boundless Cultivation base power. As it surrounded Meng Hao, his right hand shot upward. Massive amounts of violet Qi appeared above him, transforming into an curved shield.

A boom filled the air as the lightning slammed into the shield, causing it to shatter to pieces. Immediately following, a third, fourth, fifth lightning shield... a seemingly endless numbers of shields popped into place to resist the lightning. Soon the lightning bolt was as thin as a finger. Meng Hao then spit something out of his mouth, and the lightning mist appeared. It immediately swallowed up the lightning.

"Time to finish things!" said Ji Hongdong with a cold laugh. He waved the bell again, causing a chiming sound to ring out. Immediately, within the black clouds in the sky above Meng Hao, three lightning bolts intertwined with each other, seemingly on the verge of exploding down.

A gleam appeared in Meng Hao's eyes. He had already reached a good estimation of his true battle power; he had no Core Qi, but he was definitely capable of fighting someone at the peak of the early Core Formation stage who did.

However, he would not be able to secure victory; he would only be able to match blows. Meng Hao would have had the upper hand if he was fighting anyone other Ji Hongdong, who possessed the bloodline of the Ji Clan.

If he were at this moment to once again encounter the azure-masked Black Lands Cultivator, defeating him would be a simple matter.

Realization flickered within him. "Were I to cultivate Core Qi," he thought, "or acquire a Perfect Core... then exterminating the early Core Formation stage would be as simple as turning over my hand!"

He calmly looked at Ji Hongdong and said, "You're right. It's time to finish things." He slapped his bag of holding, and the blood-colored mask appeared in his hand.

The mask of the Blood Immortal Legacy. The minimum criteria to wear this mask was to have Cultivation base at the Core Formation stage.

Above Meng Hao, the three lightning bolts were condensing, preparing to descend upon him. Meng Hao slid the mask onto his face. As soon as it touched his skin, a tremor ran through his body.

He instantly felt indescribable pain on his face, as if the mask were adhering permanently to his skin. At the same time, everything in his field of vision began to turn blood red.

An evil viciousness suddenly appeared in his mind, replacing his intellect. A billowing killing intent shot up, as if he had been bedeviled.

One word echoed in his mind: "Kill.... Kill.... Kill...." It seemed as if it were being spoken by an innumerable host of people, some men, some women, some old, some young. There even seemed to be the voices of animals and plants. It was as if all living things were speaking that one word directly into his ears.

The world in front of him grew even more deeply crimson; within the space of a single breath, everything was completely red!

Within this world of redness, he felt his Cultivation base suddenly explode; he was still of the early Core Formation stage, but in this instant, he was able to form a crimson Core Qi!

The Core Qi was incredibly dense as it appeared above Meng Hao's head. If you studied it closely, you would be able to see that this Core Qi did not belong to Meng Hao, but rather to the Blood Immortal Legacy mask!

With the mask on his face, Meng Hao looked utterly bizarre. There was even a sinister demonic aura about him. Ji Hongdong looked at the mask; there were no facial features on it, only two eye holes, where Meng Hao's bright red eyes could be seen!

The redness of his eyes was the same color as the Core Qi hovering above him.

His green robe was now stained with redness; it fluttered about him, making him look like some sort of Blood Devil!

“What magical item is this?” said Ji Hongong, his expression flickering. An intense feeling of danger appeared inside him as soon as Meng Hao donned the mask. He actually had not experienced many things in life, so this feeling caused his entire body to tremble. Without thinking, he rang the bell in his hand once more. Above Meng Hao, the three lightning bolts shot down.

Meng Hao laughed. The smile produced by his laugh was obscured by the mask, but the laughter itself was grating. He began to raise his right hand up toward the three incoming lightning bolts. His hand clenched into a fist, and as he did, the crimson Core Qi above him transformed into a massive fist. A rumbling roar filled the air as it shot toward the three lightning bolts.

The resulting boom shook heaven and earth. The three lightning bolts collapsed into pieces. The sky above even trembled.

Ji Hongdong’s face fell, and his eyes were filled with veins of blood. The bell in his hand suddenly rang, and he coughed up a massive mouthful of blood. His expression grew fierce, and let out a shrill howl. “Let the will of the Heavens descend! Trial by Tribulation!”

As his words rang out, the clouds in the sky above Meng Hao suddenly redoubled, layer after layer. Within the thick blackness, nine lightning bolts appeared, seemingly congealing the will of the Heavens as they prepared to strike.

A Qi which seemed powerful enough to destroy all living things suddenly spread out. A look of consternation appeared on the face of Xu Qing, who stood off in the distance.

It was at this exact moment, however, that Meng Hao spoke.

His voice was hoarse, and bizarrely mesmerizing.

“Without a face....” Meng Hao only spoke two words of the Blood Immortal Legacy’s divine ability. Without a face, with but a word, the flames of war unify; Sundered clouds, a bloody rain, seas that cover the sky; Capture the gods, advance the troops, fire consumes the towers; Forge all spirits and bloodlines into the 9 killing powers!

These words actually contained nine Blood Immortal divine abilities; only by wearing the mask could they be utilized. Right now, a shocking magical technique of the Ancient Doom Clan, not seen for tens of thousands of years, suddenly appeared in Meng Hao’s outstretched hand.

As soon as the words were out of his mouth, the massive amounts of Core Qi above his head suddenly began to spread out, transforming into a massive face. The face had no features whatsoever, except for two eyes; it was nothing but a sea of red!

The left eye was also completely red; shockingly, though, within the the position of the right... was Meng Hao!

As soon as the massive face appeared, it shot toward the nine descending lightning bolts.

Everything shook; even though this place was not real, it could still be rocked by frantic insanity. The nine lightning bolts immediately shattered into pieces. The black clouds in the sky began to disintegrate, and as the face collided with the spirit-punishing Heaven, it too thoroughly collapsed.

This magic of facelessness transformed into a gigantic face, with an abstruse left eye and Meng Hao in the right, with no other features. It caused Ji Hongdong’s scalp to go numb, and filled him with the intense sensation of death that inundated his body.

“You....” Ji Hongdong was about to continue speaking, but his words caught in his throat. This was because at this moment, the magic of facelessness, transformed into the enormous face, suddenly appeared directly in front of him. Meng Hao, standing in the position of the right eye, lifted his hand up and seized Ji Hongdong’s neck.

His grip cut off Ji Hongdong’s words, causing the young man’s expression to twist. He wanted to struggle, but he suddenly found that his

Cultivation base was suppressed; he had no way to fight back.

His eyes filled with terror and intense dread; he could sense Meng Hao's killing intent. Its ferocity was without equal, and yet... he just couldn't believe that in the Nanshan continent, someone would dare to slay someone of the bloodline of the Ji Clan.

This concept was deeply rooted in his heart. It was something that had existed within him since he was very small. At the moment, he was in a crisis, but his fear quickly disappeared, only to be replaced with grimness. He glared at Meng Hao, and a snide smile appeared on his face.

He couldn't speak, but his eyes spoke the words: "Do you dare to kill me?" The message was immediately transmitted into Meng Hao's heart.

He did not beg for mercy, nor did he speak any ingratiating words. In this moment of life and death, he could not forget about the dignity and nobility of the bloodline of the Ji Clan. He lifted his chin and stared coldly at Meng Hao.

Meng Hao was quiet for a moment, then hoarsely said, "I really... don't want to kill you...." The redness in his eyes began to fade, replaced instead with that which was Meng Hao.

Hearing this word, a cold smile twisted Ji Hongdong's lips. Suddenly, Meng Hao's right hand tightened. A popping sound could be heard, and Ji Hongdong's eyes went wide. His neck was smashed into nothing; the power of the Blood Immortal which coursed through Meng Hao's hand, suddenly poured into Ji Hongdong's body. He trembled, and his body immediately began to wither. All the blood in his body congealed into his forehead; a mark of blood appeared, congealing into a collection of the bloodline of the Ji Clan, which suddenly flew out into the air!

The blood merged into the forehead of the mask that Meng Hao wore. The mask rippled, as if it were excited. Meng Hao loosened his grip, dropping Ji Hongdong's remains.

He closed his eyes, then lifted his right hand to remove the mask. When it came off, it revealed how pale Meng Hao's face was. The power of the mask was shocking. Were Meng Hao's Spiritual Sense not as powerful as

it was, then he would never have been able to maintain control of his own mind.

In the short period that he had wielded the power of the mask, he realized that he had lost half of a sixty-year cycle of longevity.

The price of wearing the mask was extremely high.

Meng Hao turned Xu Qing, his face pale. Biting down on his lip, he softly said, "We're safe now. No one will know your secret.

Xu Qing stared blankly at Meng Hao, her eyes filling with tears. She was a simple person, but she knew the price Meng Hao had paid to protect her secret.

He had killed a Ji Clan member, and had thus provoked great calamity. In order to not implicate his Sect, he had forsaken it.... Now, he had no choice but to become a wanderer. He would never be able to return to the Southern Domain, nor would he be able to hide from the Ji Clan.

Furthermore, he was only a Core Formation Cultivator....

Xu Qing bit down on her lip, but couldn't hold back the tears. They slid down her face, and yet, never touched the ground; Meng Hao lifted up his hand to wipe them away.

"Don't cry," he said, smiling. "There's a long road ahead. Who knows when it is that we will meet again." His face was pale as he smiled, which served only to imprint his words deeper in Xu Qing's heart.

"I'm leaving now," he continued. "This place will be collapsing soon." He looked deeply into her eyes, knowing that after he turned to leave, they would be as separated as if one was alive and the other dead. Even if he made it out with his life, who knew how many years would pass before he could return.

When he was able to return, who knew if the beautiful woman who stood in front of him now, would still be the same as before.

But Meng Hao had no regrets. Ji Hongdong had to die. Be it for Xu Qing, or for himself, only Ji Hongdong's death could assure their continued life.

Even if he hid Ji Hongdong's body within the blood-colored mask, Meng Hao knew it would do no good against the power of the Ji Clan. In fact, the consequences might be even more severe.

Perhaps there had been a third path he could have trod; unfortunately, things had happened too quickly, and he hadn't been able to puzzle out what that third path might have been. As far as trying to kill using Meng Hao's identity, then live normally as Fang Mu, attempting that would show that he didn't understand the terrifying power of the Ji Clan. That was his judgement based on everything that he had experienced.

Had he attempted to do that, then there was a ninety percent probability that the entire Violet Fate Sect would be sucked into destruction. That was a choice he refused to make.

Meng Hao turned, and as he did, he suddenly realized someone was embracing him from behind. It felt soft and warm.

"I'll wait for you," said Xu Qing. Her voice carried persistence. Regardless of past, present or future lives, they would be together forever.

Chapter 307: Fang Mu is Meng Hao!

The moment Ji Hongdong died, something happened on the other side of the Milky Way Sea, on the border of the vast Eastern Lands, atop a white mountain. The mountain had no snow on it; instead, the crags which formed it were completely white in color, seemingly without blemishes or impurities.

In the Eastern Lands, this place was called White Mountain.

Somewhere on White Mountain was a cistern. This cistern was so deep, that according to the legends, the waters within went down as far as the mountain was tall.

Sitting next to the cistern was an old man. He was gaunt, his face expressionless, and in his hand he held a fishing pole. The fishing line descended down into the cistern, and at the moment, it was motionless.

Suddenly, the fishing line went taut. The old man's expression didn't change; he simply pulled up with his right hand. A bizarre, miserable shriek pierced the air as the fishing line flew up. Hooked on the end was a globule of light.

If you looked closely at the light, you could see that it was comprised of countless glowing threads. On each of these threads were faces, and in the middle of them all, in the center of the globule of light, was a middle-aged man. His expression was one of terror, and he immediately dropped to his knees and began to beg for mercy.

The old man looked at him and coolly said, "For me to fish your Karma out of all the multitude of living creatures is nothing but luck for you, right? Why beg for mercy?" His hand made a clutching motion in mid-air, and the globule of light flew into his hand. As he grabbed it, the middle-aged man within let out a defiant howl, the kind that comes the moment before death. In addition, he emitted the Qi of the great circle of the late Nascent Soul stage.

The old man allowed the Qi to emanate out. Then, he popped the globule of light into his mouth. A few crunching sounds could be heard,

and then he swallowed. Some blood oozed out from the corners of his mouth, which he quickly licked up. His eyes filled with a bright glow.

“Ah, the flavor of Karma....” he murmured. After some time passed he looked up into the sky, then suddenly dropped to his knees and prostrated himself.

He kowtowed nine times, then raised himself up and looked at the cistern. After a while, he frowned. He thrust his hand out, and a shattered jade slip appeared in his hand.

“Hmm?” His eyes glowed. “A son of Ji died.... One of the sons of Ji, of my bloodline. Dead in the Southern Domain...?” He pinched down onto the jade slip, and the image of a face appeared in his mind.

The face belonged to none other than Meng Hao!

At the same time, a sharp voice echoed out in his mind.

“Patriarch, the person who killed me is named Fang Mu of the Violet Fate Sect, also known as Meng Hao!” The voice belonged to none other than Ji Hongdong. This was the last bit of will that remained in him before he died. The voice was sad and shrill, filled with intense resentment.

There was no way Meng Hao could possibly have predicted that this would happen. The Ji Clan had a method with which to transmit voices along with their death; Meng Hao was only aware of the ability to transmit images.

Luckily, extracting the Clan blood from Ji Hongdong before his ultimate death had inflicted quite a bit of pain; as a result, Ji Hongdong’s consciousness had been thrown into chaos. The only thing he had been able to do was transmit Meng Hao’s name; he had completely forgotten about the matter of Xu Qing.

“Useless fool,” said the old man with a slight frown. “However, useless as he might have been, the blood of the Ji Clan still flowed within his veins. How could mortals have killed him so easily? Although, the Violet Fate Sect....” Shockingly, this old man viewed Cultivators as mere mortals!

He flicked his wide sleeve, transforming the jade slip into ash. Then, he

leaped up into the air, disappearing in the blink of an eye.

Only his sinister voice remained, echoing throughout the mountain:
“The Southern Domain. I haven’t been there for years.”

Outside the Rebirth Cave, eight old men sat cross-legged beneath the banner of the Ji Clan. One by one, their eyes opened. Astonishment and disbelief shined out as they rose to their feet.

Their eyes were filled with veins of blood, and intensely violent killing intent poured out. This shocking sight shook everyone in the area. One by one, Cultivators from the other Sects and Clans looked over in astonishment as they watched indescribable frenzied rage and killing intent rising up from the eight old men.

All of them were Nascent Soul eccentrics, with extraordinary Cultivation bases. Their combined killing intent was enough to shake the Heavens, rock the Earth and change the color of the wind.

“One of the sons of Ji has perished...” The eight men exchanged glances. Amidst their rising killing intent, they could also sense the mutual fear which caused their hearts to tremble.

Based on the laws of the Ji Clan, they knew that if they did not find Ji Hongdong’s killer, then they would be sent to the grave with Ji Hongdong as burial offerings. In fact, all of the Clan members within their sphere of influence would instantly be exterminated.

That was the price to be paid if they did not find the killer and bring him back to the Eastern Lands!

One among the eight men lifted his hand to slap his bag of holding. Immediately, fragments of a jade slip appeared, eight of them. Each of the other old men took one, and then they held them out to join them together. Immediately, a warm glow shone out.

The light climbed up into the sky, and the faces of the eight old men were incredibly grim as they studied it closely. It wasn’t just them; the Cultivators of the surrounding Sects were also closely observing what was

happening.

Within the glow appeared a figure; he wore a mask, making it impossible to determine what he looked like. However, the mask overflowed with bloody killing intent. It immediately caused the hearts of all onlookers to tremble.

“That’s....”

“That’s the mask of the Blood Immortal Legacy! That’s the mask of the Blood Immortal of the Ancient Doom Clan!”

“You’re right! During the last Blood Immortal Legacy Tournament, I saw it with my own eyes.... But didn’t the Li Clan say that there was some accident, and that it was lost within the Blood Immortal Legacy zone? Of course, the great Sects didn’t believe them, and conducted their own investigations, however, in the end they determined that the Li Clan didn’t acquire the legacy....”

When the eight old men heard these words, their eyes glittered, and their killing intent grew more intense. They looked at the pillar of light belonging to the Li Clan, causing the Li Clan members’ faces to instantly flicker.

Before any explanations could be made, though, eight beams of light suddenly approached from off in the distance. They screamed forward, and as they approached, it was clear that Li Clan Elders were approaching.

The old man in the lead cried, “Li Clan Dao Child Li Daoyi perished in this place. Fellow Daoists, do you recognize this person?” He waved his hand, and an illusory screen appeared, upon which was the image of Meng Hao.

At the exact same moment, the masked figure within the beam of light protected by the Ji Clan’s had slip suddenly distorted, transforming into another image. Again, it was none other than... Meng Hao!

Right now, the eyes of everyone in the area were fixed on the two glowing screens, and the person depicted there. Their minds reeled.

They reeled because of the news that the Dao Child of the Li Clan had

perished.

They reeled because all of the Clans and Sects of the Southern Domain suddenly put the pieces of the puzzle together; now they knew why the Ji Clan had produced the broken jade slip, and why the figure there was the same as that produced by the Li Clan.

One of the Patriarchs from the Golden Frost Clan gasped. “Could it be that... one of the sons of Ji of the Ji Clan....”

“If that’s true, then whoever did it has provoked a great disaster! The Ji Clan of the Eastern Lands.... How could they possibly let this matter rest!?”

“Which Sect is the killer a disciple of...?”

Everything was deathly silent. All of the Cultivators present began to slowly back away.

“That... that looks like that guy Meng Hao who disappeared a few years ago....”

“Meng Hao? The Sublime Spirit Scripture! I remember! That’s Meng Hao!”

“Meng Hao....”

A great buzz of conversation filled the area surrounding the basin. Amidst the uproar, the eyes of the old men from the Ji Clan boiled with killing intent, as did those of the Elders from the Li Clan.

The old man from the Li Clan gritted his teeth and said, “This Meng Hao is still within the Corpse’s illusory land. Let’s seal off the area! Teleportation is prohibited! It doesn’t matter what treasures that little bastard has, he won’t be able to escape even if he has wings!” The surrounding Nascent Soul Elders immediately shot off toward the north, south, east and west.

Clearly, they planned to seal the area and prevent anyone from teleporting away.

“One of the sons of Ji of the Ji Clan has perished here. Fellow Daoists of the Southern Domain, please remain here and wait until all details are

brought to light. Until then, no one is permitted to leave.” Immediately, four of the eight Ji Clan Elders dispersed. Obviously, they did not put complete faith in the methods of the Li Clan, and would implement their own sealing measures.

“Apparently this person possesses some arts of transformation,” said another of the old men from the Ji Clan, along with a cold snort. “That doesn’t matter. Having killed a member of the Ji Clan, he has been stained with the Karma of Heaven and Earth. Once he emerges into the world, we will be able to sense him.”

It was at this moment that suddenly, a freezing Qi suddenly blasted out from near the Rebirth Cave. It contained a fearsome potency; the might of Spirit Severing. Slowly, a tall figure strode out from within the basin.

He was a middle-aged man, wearing a long, orange robe. As he strode out, he attracted the attention of all of the surrounding Cultivators from the various Sects. They all immediately recognised him; this was the most powerful expert present among the Ji Clan.

His Cultivation base was at the Spirit Severing level; when all of the other Clan Patriarchs had retreated from the basin surrounding the Rebirth Cave, he had remained behind. He knew that the cave was a fearsome place, even for someone of the Spirit Severing stage, and that unless absolutely necessary, no one would enter it. In fact, none of the Patriarchs from the various local Sects were willing to enter it; at most, they would approach the mouth of the cave.

This man had not retreated, and as such, had engaged in quite a few battles with various strange life forms in the vicinity of the cave. As he emerged from the area, his face was grim. When he reached the eight old men from the Ji Clan, all of them respectfully clasped hands in salute.

The middle-aged man opened his hand to reveal some shattered powder that was all which remained of a jade slip.

“The killer is Fang Mu of the Violet Fate Sect, also known as Meng Hao!” the man said coolly. “That was the message transmitted by Ji Hongdong before his death. This matter has even stirred Patriarch Ji Fang, who is

currently hurrying here from the Eastern Lands.” Though his voice was calm, it contained an intense threatening air, which caused the hearts of the members of all the surrounding Sects to fill with trembling. 1

“Fang Mu.... Meng Hao....”

“How could that be possible!? Fang Mu of the East Pill Division of the Violet Fate Sect is also the same guy everyone was looking for throughout the Southern Domain that year, Meng Hao?!?!”

“This.... No wonder no one could ever find Meng Hao. He was hiding in the Violet Fate Sect. He even became a Legacy Apprentice....”

Amidst the commotion, one gaze after another came to fall upon the pillar of light belonging to the Violet Fate Sect. Within, the faces of the Violet Fate Sect Cultivators instantly began to change.

An Zaihai’s face fell. Next to him Lin Hailong gasped and rose to his feet. Wu Dingqiu stared mutely for a moment, and then his face grew incredibly grim. A profound sense of crisis filled the minds and hearts of all the Violet Fate Sect disciples.

It was at this moment that within the Violet Fate Sect’s pillar of light, the eyes of the Spirit Severing Patriarchs slowly opened.

*

1. Ji Fang’s name in Chinese is 季方 jì fāng – Ji is a family name. Fang is the same Fang as “Fang Mu.

Chapter 308: I'm His Master!

The first Violet Fate Sect Spirit Severing Patriarch was silent for a moment before saying, "I've received a message from the Sect Leader. Fang Mu of the East Pill Division has forsaken the Violet Fate Sect. We do not know whether he is alive or dead. If he is alive, he has nothing to do with the Violet Fate Sect. Similarly, If he is dead, it similarly does not have anything to do with us."

His eyes glowed brightly as his words echoed out one by one. To speak such words caused him to feel utter humiliation, as well as intense sorrow.

The other Spirit Severing Patriarch said nothing, but a slight frown appeared on his face. There seemed to be a fury in his eyes that was just on the verge of exploding. However, he knew that they could not under any circumstances offend the Ji Clan.

They were the only people present who knew about the matter of Fang Mu, and in fact, they really had just received an urgent command from the Violet Fate Sect. The wording in the command was simple. It didn't mention the death of a member of the Ji Clan, but it did say that momentous changes were about to occur. It said that Fang Mu had voluntarily forsaken the Sect, and that if any mishaps were to occur, the two Patriarchs were to explain this immediately.

The two of them had assumed something important had happened, and with the developments just now, it was obvious exactly where the problem lay. Each had lived for a thousand years, so it naturally took only a moment for them to ascertain the crux of the matter.

Regardless of whether his name was Fang Mu or Meng Hao, the kid apparently had been faced with no other choice than to attack, and had killed a member of the Ji Clan. In order to not implicate the Sect, he had voluntarily crushed his Violet Furnace Lord medallion, making a clean break.

Such a choice caused the two Spirit Severing Patriarchs to feel pain in their hearts. This was a disciple of their Sect, a Legacy Apprentice of the

East Pill Division. In a moment of crisis, he had taken steps to prevent any trouble for the Sect.

Unfortunately... they had no way to protect him. No one in the Violet Fate Sect could do anything for him now. The two Patriarchs had no choice but to coldly distance themselves from him, in front of all of the Cultivators in the entire Southern Domain.

His life didn't matter. His death didn't matter. He had nothing to do with the Violet Fate Sect.

The words they had spoken led to instant silence in the area. Shocked and perplexed looks filled the faces of many of the Cultivators from the other Sects. They could hear the helplessness within the words, and when compared to the domineering power of the Ji Clan, it caused them to instantly feel sympathy.

The Spirit Severing Cultivator from the Ji Clan stared coldly at the Violet Fate Sect disciples for a moment, then snorted. Other than that, however, he did nothing.

Silence reigned. No one spoke. Everyone was waiting for the disciples who had disappeared to return.

Restrictive spells had already sprung up all around. As of now, there was absolutely no way for anyone to use the power of teleportation. After a moment, however, within the Black Sieve Sect's pillar of light, Patriarch Violet Sieve's eyes began to glitter.

Finally, he spoke up. "Fellow Daoists from the Ji Clan, and other members of the senior generation. I happen to know that Meng Hao possesses a good luck charm from the ancient Good Luck Sect. I'm afraid your restrictive spells...." He smiled, but didn't finish speaking.

Hearing these words immediately caused the eyes of the Ji Clan Elders to flicker as they exchanged glances. The Spirit Severing Cultivator waved his right hand, and a jade pendant appeared.

"Place this within the restrictive spell. It can block the good luck charm."

The faces of the two Violet Fate Sect Spirit Severing Patriarchs grew

dark. They glared at Patriarch Violet Sieve, ill intentions flickering in their eyes, barely concealed.

The disciples of the various Sects were so shocked that they were like cicadas in the dead of winter. Various thoughts ran through their heads. They thought of Fang Mu, and then Meng Hao, and their expressions flickered through various stages of astonishment.

Fang Mu was thoroughly famous in the Southern Domain. It was said that he was like the sun at high noon amongst the others of his generation. No one could compare to him. He was Grandmaster Pill Demon's Legacy Apprentice, Dao Child of the East Pill Division, one of the four Grandmasters of the Southern Domain... Pill Cauldron....

As for Meng Hao, the appearance of the Blood Immortal mask caused everyone's hearts to be filled with a roar of shock.

He possessed the Sublime Spirit Scripture, was son-in-law of the Song Clan, and now, recipient of the Blood Immortal legacy!

Amidst the silence, the faces of the Song Clan members were somewhat unsightly as they sat in their pillar of light. Eccentric Song was there too, frowning and sighing inwardly.

All of the Cultivators present, including the Spirit Severing Patriarchs, were oblivious to the fact that an old man had suddenly joined the crowd. He was emaciated and unimposing in appearance. However, no one noticed that he was there, almost as if he weren't part of the world.

The old man smiled. "You entered the realm of Perfection, kid," he said lightly to himself. "There's a thing called Karma in the world, and today, I will help you to sow it. In the future, I will seize your Perfection, that will be the reaping of the Karma." No one, of course, could hear him. This was none other than the ancient tenth Patriarch of the Wang Clan.

Everyone continued to wait silently.

Meanwhile, at the very edge of the Southern Domain, near where the State of Zhao used to exist, past the numerous mountain ranges, was a vast sea.

This was none other than the Milky Way Sea, which separated the West and South from the North and East.

Suddenly the air above the Milky Way Sea outside of the Southern Domain began to ripple and distort. A blurry image appeared, a person, who suddenly stepped forward. The figure was indistinct at first, but it rapidly coalesced into an old man.

This was none other than the old man who had been fishing Karma on the peak of White Mountain in the Eastern Lands, Ji Clan Patriarch Ji Fang!

He hovered in mid-air above the Milky Way Sea, looking out at the Southern Domain. Then, his body flickered, and he shot forward. However, even as he neared the border of the Southern Domain and was about to enter, he frowned and let out a cold snort. He raised his right arm and flicked it out ahead of him.

A boom filled the air, spreading out in all directions, causing the ocean water beneath him to seethe and roar. The land comprising the border of the Southern Domain quaked, and the great boulders lining the seashore cracked and disintegrated.

As the land crumbled and the seawater churned, an old man appeared in front of Ji Fang. He wore a long gray robe upon each sleeve of which was the image of a pill furnace.

The old man's hair was long and white, and he was very thin, with dark blotches on his skin. His expression was placid, yet filled with power. His eyes glowed brightly, and a Heavenly aura seemed to be concealed within them.

The strong aroma of medicinal pills wafted out from him to fill the area.

Ji Fang gave him a cold look and then said, "Should I call you Violet East, or Pill Demon?!"

This old man was none other than Meng Hao's Master, Pill Demon!

Pill Demon was silent for a moment, then looked back at Ji Fang. "Violet East has perished, I'm Pill Demon."

“Well, it doesn’t matter if you’re Pill Demon or Violet East,” he said coldly, lifting his head slightly, “if you want to prevent the Violet Fate Sect from being destroyed, then get out of my way. Anyone who kills a member of my Ji Clan must die!”

Pill Demon shook his head. “I’m his Master. He kowtowed to me three times, now it’s time for me to do something for him.” He waved his right arm, and suddenly a bronze pill furnace magically appeared in his hand. It immediately emanated an ancient Qi, which spilled out in all directions. A bluish mist poured out from the pill furnace, circling around, making the entire area into a world of fog.

“If you were really Violet East, then I might have some misgivings,” said Ji Fang with a harrumph. “But as for you, you’re clearly... looking to die!” With that he raised his hand, and the mist grew thicker, immediately inundating both himself and Pill Demon.

It was impossible to see them now. Only explosion after explosion could be heard, echoing out from within the mist. Beneath them, the Milky Way Sea seethed. The border lands of the Southern Domain quaked. Each and every attack made by either man contained enough power to shake the Heavens and rock the Earth.

A grim voice echoed out from within the mist. “Pill Demon, is it really worth it to do something like this for your apprentice? You might be able to stop me, but can you stop the entire Ji Clan?”

“He chose to become my apprentice, and I chose to become his Master. That’s not something that can be erased by forsaking a Sect. I believe it’s worth it. All of it! I can’t stop the Ji Clan, but I can hold you off for a moment. That’s enough!”

Another explosion shook the heavens. The battle shook this remote area where the Southern Domain met the Milky Way Sea.

The mist churned, lightning crackled, thunder boomed; the battle rose to a climax.

The walls within Choumen Tai’s illusory mental realm were now collapsing. As Meng Hao disappeared, Xu Qing bit her lip and closed her

eyes.

Meng Hao left. He was no longer Fang Mu, but instead looked like he had when he'd left the State of Zhao, although now his Cultivation base was at the Core Formation stage. He transformed into a beam of light and shot off into the distance.

He wasn't leaving the maze, he was leaving Xu Qing.

He didn't look back.

The green mark on the back of his hand flickered. It had appeared after he had formed the Violet Core, and the blood began to circulate through his veins.

It appeared to be a magical symbol. Of course, he had seen it before, back when he reached Foundation Establishment, as well in the Violet Fate Sect when Choumen Tai had called out to him.

As he proceeded forward, more and more walls began to crumble into pieces. The entire maze seemed to be collapsing, and many of the Cultivators stranded within were now able to see each other. They quickly began to form groups based on whichever Sect or Clan they belonged to.

However, anyone who wasn't fast enough to regroup became the subject of attack, causing the entire place to begin to dissolve into chaos.

Meng Hao whistled through the air, moving faster and faster. No one could make out his face, only the shape of his figure as he shot past.

The rumbling roars grew more intense as the walls continued to collapse. Meng Hao suddenly paused for a moment. Based on the collapse around him, he knew that it would only be moments before the entire place was gone.

"Because of the deaths of Li Daoyi and Ji Hongdong, the outside world has been sealed down. It seems my good luck charm... is not going to help me." A glow appeared in his eyes. The instant he had made his move on Ji Hongdong, many thoughts had been racing through his mind.

"My only chance... will be the Rebirth Cave, fifty kilometers away!" He

took a deep breath, and then suddenly, his expression flickered. A mist suddenly covered his body, and he shot off in a new direction.

It didn't take long before up ahead of him appeared Chu Yuyan, Ye Feimu, as well as some other Violet Fate Sect disciples. They were surrounded and under attack by Western Desert Cultivators.

"Fellow Daoists from the Violet Fate Sect," cried one of them in a grim voice, "hand over the copy of those inscriptions you just made, and we'll leave you alone. If you don't, then we don't care if you belong to a great Sect of the Southern Domain, we will exterminate you nonetheless!" The totem tattoos on their bodies began to ripple. Chu Yuyan, Ye Feimu and the other disciples, who were from the Violet Qi Division, were doing their best to defend themselves.

Ye Feimu was seriously injured, and his face was pale. However, he continued fighting doggedly. Blood oozed out of the corners of Chu Yuyan's mouth, and her right arm dripped with gore. Her face was pale, and her jaw clenched.

Everyone else was also injured, and were clearly fighting for their lives.

Next to them, two Violet Qi Division disciples slumped against the wall, although it wasn't clear whether they were dead or alive.

Chapter 309: Another Wave Rises

“This place could collapse at any moment!” said Ye Feimu, his voice weak. “Once it does, we’ll be teleported out!” He was speaking, of course, to the Violet Fate Sect disciples, not the Western Desert Cultivators.

His face was pale, and within the paleness could be seen pulsing black lines. It wasn’t poison, but rather some sort of parasitic insect, the result of some bizarre magical technique from the Western Desert. After being infected, the result would be either injury and critical Cultivation base loss, or death.

Were it not for this, Ye Feimu wouldn’t be in the current state he was, not considering the level of his Cultivation base.

Chu Yuyan clenched her jaw, slapped her bag of holding, and produced some medicinal pills which she swallowed. The whole group wore expressions of resolve. Unfortunately, other than Chu Yuyan, all of them had the strange black lines on their faces; it seemed they had all had been infected by the parasitic insect.

The Cultivation bases of the Western Desert Cultivators were not that much higher than those of Chu Yuyan and the others. They were all in the early Core Formation stage, and not even the peak. Therefore, they hesitated for a moment. The reason they hadn’t moved in for the kill already was that they didn’t want to provoke too much trouble in the Southern Domain. However, the etchings from just now were a precious treasure; seeing the resolve on the faces of the Violet Fate Sect disciples caused them to exchange glances. Finally, killing intent sprang from their eyes.

“Kill them! Before this place collapses!” Eyes glittered and attacks were begun. The power of their totems manifested, transforming into four enormous beasts which charged toward Chu Yuyan and the others.

It was at this moment of crisis that Meng Hao appeared. Mist covered him, making his features indistinguishable. Before the Western Desert Cultivators could even see him clearly, he was standing in front of Chu

Yuyan and the others. He lifted his right hand and waved it forward. Immediately, a violet glow appeared in front of him which transformed into an enormous curved moon shape.

A violet moon, with the power to sever lives. It slammed into the four beasts, sending out a massive explosion. The Western Desert Cultivators looked on in shock, and then retreated one after another. The totem tattoos on two of them immediately began to ripple, incapable of holding up against the power. The attack then slammed into the Cultivators, ripping their bodies to shreds.

As for the other two, one coughed up a mouthful of blood, narrowly managing to avoid the attack. The other was the most powerful of the group, and the one who had put Ye Feimu out of commission. His Cultivation base was at the mid Core Formation stage.

Meng Hao's appearance caused Chu Yuyan to stare in shock. Seeing the appearance of the Violet Gibbous Moon filled her with astonishment.

That was an art only the Violet Fate Sect possessed, and that no outsider could ever master.

"Screw off!" said Meng Hao, glaring coolly at the two unharmed Western Desert Cultivators.

His words were filled with enormous pressure, causing the Cultivator who had avoided the blow to immediately turn to flee. He was a Western Desert Cultivator; to him life was filled with adversity. He had no concept of honor and glory; to him survival was the most important thing. Therefore, since he could clearly see that he had no chance of winning, he chose to retreat.

Before leaving, he clasped hands and bowed to Meng Hao. He respected strength; it didn't matter if Meng Hao had just killed his compatriots.

The other Western Desert Cultivator, the middle-aged man with the mid Core Formation Cultivation base, hesitated for a moment. He looked at Meng Hao, and then at Ye Feimu and the others. Finally, he turned to depart.

“Leave behind the anti doe!” said Meng Hao coldly.

The man sighed inwardly, then waved his arm to send a black bottle flying out. Meng Hao wasn't worried about whether or not the man was planning any tricks. The complete collapse of this place was just around the corner; once it did collapse, everyone would be sent out. When that happened, all of the minor problems would be easily solved.

Meng Hao turned back to look through the mist at Chu Yuyan and the others. “This place is about to fall apart. All of you... take care of yourselves.” His face filled with conflicting emotions, he made his way off into the distance.

“Who are you?” Chu Yuyan suddenly asked.

Meng Hao didn't respond. He made his way off thoughtfully.

Ye Feimu watched him leaving, and then suddenly said, “Fang Mu, what happened?!”

His words instantly sent Chu Yuyan reeling. The other Violet Qi Division disciples all looked off toward Meng Hao.

Meng Hao paused for a moment. He sighed softly, then called back, “From now on, there is no more Fang Mu in the Violet Fate Sect....” Then he continued on his way.

Chu Yuyan and Ye Feimu gaped, their faces filled with astonishment. However, it took only a moment for Chu Yuyan's phoenix-like eyes to suddenly narrow.

“That voice....” Her breathing suddenly grew ragged as she looked off at Meng Hao's retreating form.

Rumbling booms echoed out as the collapse of the surrounding walls continued. The walls in the immediate vicinity were completely toppled, revealing nothingness. Some of the Cultivators began to be sucked out into the nothingness, and then disappear.

Meng Hao looked around with an expression of concentration and cautiousness. He wasn't sure of the exact circumstances outside, but he

could guess that there would be extreme danger. He didn't take any sort of reckless action, but instead carefully observed the nothingness beyond the collapse of the walls.

Not much time passed before the roaring grew more intense. Everything was falling apart. Meng Hao's gaze flickered, and he was just about to fly off into the nothingness when suddenly, his expression flickered. He lifted his hand and waved his sleeve; the two indestructible wooden swords flew out, moving to defend Meng Hao's side.

It was at this exact moment that a boom resonated out. The fist of a woman punched through the air toward him, seemingly out of nowhere. The fist smashed into the violet mist which surrounded him, causing it to collapse instantly. The fist didn't pause, instead proceeding directly on toward Meng Hao's swords.

An enormous blast radiated out.

The two swords hummed and shook, spinning back and slamming into Meng Hao's chest. Pain filled his body, and he flopped backward like a kite with its string cut, blood spraying from his mouth.

He looked over to see that the owner of the fist was none other than the young woman surnamed Fang. She wore a long green robe, along with an air of aloof elegance. She slowly approached through the void.

She was beautiful, but she had hit Meng Hao with an astonishing blow from her fist. The power of the fist far exceeded the early Core Formation stage. Physical power such as this was shocking to Meng Hao.

The violet mist roiled around Meng Hao, and as he stared at the woman, his pupils turned violet. His wounds began to rapidly heal, and within the space of a few breaths he was completely back to normal, except for a slightly paler face.

He wiped the blood from his mouth and looked up at the woman, his face grim.

"Such power..." he thought. "Such incredible power! That was far beyond Ji Hongdong; I think that blow just now could easily wipe out a normal

early Core Formation stage Cultivator!” His eyes narrowed.

“Running away pretty quickly, I see,” she said coolly. “I see you killed that annoying Ji Hongdong who everybody hated. Well, I can kill you easily. Take out the Immortal treasure and give it to me. You can’t even use it anyway.” She was not proud and arrogant the way Ji Hongdong was, but rather aloof. Clearly, she was much more powerful than him as well.

She also seemed to possess an incredibly domineering air, even a bossiness.

She waited for the space of two breaths and then said, “You don’t agree? Fine, then you can just DIE!” She stepped forward at incredible speed, and was instantly directly in front of Meng Hao. She raised her right hand, and the fist descended toward him.

Meng Hao began an incantation with both hands. A five-fingered Blood Palm sprang up; beneath his feet, the glow of the Blood Death World appeared. Blood Clones popped out and seemed to merge with his body. As the fist neared, he struck out with his palm.

A shocking boom filled the air, and massive power shook the ground beneath the two of them, shattering what remained of any nearby walls. A vortex of nothingness appeared and began to suck everything in.

Meng Hao coughed up some blood as he tumbled backward. Violet Qi roiled throughout his body, and his pupils glowed with a blinding violet radiance. His wounds once again healed; however, his face was even paler than before.

This recovery had cost him some of his life force, and life force represented longevity. He retreated, a cold glow emanating from his eyes. He slapped his bag of holding to produce the blood-colored mask.

The young woman took two steps back, a fierce expression filling her eyes.

“You’re the first person in the early Core Formation stage that’s ever been able to make me fall back!” she said unyieldingly.

“I can make you bleed as well,” replied Meng Hao, his eyes filled with as

much coldness as hers. He lifted his hand to place the mask on his face, and as he did, the young woman let out a cold snort. The killing intent in her eyes grew even stronger. Her body flickered as she shot toward Meng Hao, raising her fist into the air.

“FANG!” She called out only the one word, but the instant she did, the colour of her fist changed into green. Countless green lightning bolts surrounded it, and it emanated a shocking and terrifying Qi that caused Meng Hao’s scalp to go numb.

The speed with which the young woman approached caused Meng Hao’s heart to fill with an intense sense of crisis. He had not experienced such a feeling even when fighting against Ji Hongdong just now. In fact, it had been a very long time since he had experienced such a crushing pressure from anyone in the same generation as himself.

“DIE!” cried the young woman, her voice echoing out in all directions as she neared Meng Hao.

At this exact moment, Meng Hao’s right hand placed the mask onto his face. A Qi of blood and death immediately exploded out from him.

It was also at this exact same moment that the back of the hand he had used to place the mask on his face was suddenly facing the Fang girl. In addition, the green mark which had appeared on the back of his hand when he formed his Core had not disappeared. It suddenly... flickered slightly.

The green mark flashed like a magical symbol, and the young woman saw it. The instant she did, her eyes went wide, and filled with complete disbelief.

Her fist was almost upon Meng Hao. She suddenly let out an exasperated grunt. Risking a recoil of energy, she twisted her attack to the side, causing her fist to slam into the ground next to Meng Hao.

A boom filled the air, and massive cracks filled the ground, revealing nothingness beneath them. Even the nothingness seemed to tremble, threatening to collapse from the power of the fist.

The young woman coughed up a mouthful of blood. Her hair flew about her in disarray, and she turned her head to glare at Meng Hao, her eyes filled with fury and disharmony.

This caused Meng Hao to gape at her openly. He wasn't sure what had happened just now in the critical moment to cause her to change the direction of her fist. She must have known that doing what she had done just now would result in injury to herself.

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1. Title: This is the last half of a common Chinese expression describing how a new conflict appears when a previous conflict remains unresolved. The expression literally translated is “one wave calms, another wave rises”

Chapter 310: Blazing as Brilliantly as Ever!

“DAMMIT!” howled the young woman. She was very beautiful, and her appearance before she had attacked just now was charming and gentle. However, her moves had been as explosive as a dragon.

Right now, her howl was filled with potent power, and an aura that seemed to proclaim that she was the most important person in the world. Seeing her like this caused Meng Hao’s scalp to go numb; he had never before witnessed a woman behaving like this.

“DAMMIT!” she roared. She clenched her right hand into a fist and smashed it into the ground. There wasn’t much ground left to begin with, and her blow caused it to crumble even further.

“Why couldn’t it be black!?”

BOOM!

“Why couldn’t it be red!?”

BAM!

“Why couldn’t it be violet!?”

With every sentence, she violently slammed her fist down onto the ground around Meng Hao, causing the ground to begin to disintegrate. Soon, only the spot directly beneath his feet was left remaining.

The slamming fists even caused the nothingness around them to begin to collapse....

Meng Hao’s scalp grew even more numb. This girl was crazy! Such bizarre power... really went beyond Meng Hao’s imagination. He had the feeling that even though he was wearing the blood-colored mask, he still wasn’t a match for this lunatic.

Suddenly, Meng Hao thought back to how Ji Hongdong had described this young woman, and suddenly completely agreed.

Seeing how she was smashing the nothingness into smithereens, Meng Hao quickly turned and sped off in a different direction into the

nothingness. As he charged off, he heard the girl raging.

“Why did it have to be green!?”

BLAM!

His face pale, Meng Hao prepared to be teleported out of the nothingness. He looked down briefly at the back of his hand, and the mark, which was gradually fading.

“Could it really be because of this mark...” he thought, hesitating for a moment. Thinking back to the fearsomeness of the crazy young woman, he shuddered. From the time he was small until the time he grew up, from when he studied as a scholar to when he began to practice cultivation, this was the first time he had ever been this frightened of a woman.

Meng Hao’s eyes began to grow hazy. When they cleared, he could see a black fog overhead, and could also sense a familiar Qi. This... was the region of the Rebirth Cave.

Right now, the Immortal’s corpse was rapidly shrinking. From the looks of it, it would very soon return to the size of a normal human.

People were currently being teleported out all over the place, in various positions. The instant Meng Hao appeared, he pulled out the good luck charm. It took only a moment to test it out, whereupon Meng Hao frowned. As he had anticipated, it wouldn’t work.

Putting the good luck charm away, Meng Hao immediately shot off in the direction of the Rebirth Cave. Even before emerging, he had made up his mind. He knew that he would be stuck in this area, and as such, was dead without a doubt. There would be no way to flee.

His only chance of survival lay upon the path of death... the Rebirth Cave!

Such a path of death, in comparison to his current predicament, was a chance for survival!

He had no other options. It was a gamble, but he had thought through everything, and as such, charged forward immediately.

The instant he had teleported out, outside of the misty basin, by the more than ten pillars of light, the eyes of the middle-aged man from the Ji Clan suddenly opened.

“He’s here!” he said, waving his right hand. Immediately, a glowing image appeared in front of him; it was none other than the fleeing Meng Hao. “He’s heading north!” he said coolly, flickering off in pursuit. The Nascent Soul Elders of the Ji Clan followed him into the fog of the basin, their faces grim and filled with killing intent.

The dozen or so Li Clan Cultivators also flew into the air in quick succession, faces filled with killing intent as they went in pursuit of Meng Hao.

Any one of these people could kill Meng Hao with the wave of a finger. However, each and every one of them joined the chase; pursuing Meng Hao was a matter which all felt that they must participate in.

They entered the fog, but as they did, not a single one could sense the presence of the tenth Wang Clan Patriarch. He smiled as he also moved in the same direction. He was in plain sight, and yet no one noticed him as he joined them within the fog.

The Nascent Soul Cultivators of the Ji and Li Clans proceeded through the black fog, and as they did, their Cultivation bases were slowly suppressed. Soon, they were back within the great circle of the Core Formation stage.

Despite that, any one of them was powerful enough to immediately slay Meng Hao.

They moved onward with incredible speed. As for the middle-aged Spirit Severing Cultivator from the Ji Clan, his Cultivation base was even more suppressed. He could fight against it, but not for long. At the moment, his Cultivation base was at the Nascent Soul stage.

He was moving with the greatest speed through the fog. As he whistled through the air, suddenly, he heard a cough that sounded very ancient, coming from off to the side.

The cough was too sudden; it immediately caused the middle-aged man's face to flicker and stop moving temporarily.

"Who are you?!" he said, anxiety and doubt showing on his face. Even though his Cultivation base was suppressed, he was still a powerful Spirit Severing expert; his ability to sense danger had flashed as soon as he heard the cough. It transformed into a droning in his mind, and he had the feeling that the owner of the voice could kill him immediately if he so wished.

"Which member of the senior generation is here?" he asked, his scalp growing numb. He thought of the Rebirth Cave, and suddenly a sense of crisis filled him that caused him to begin to pant. "Sir, I am of the Ji Clan...."

"How is... Ji Shiyi?" said the ancient voice, seemingly filled with emotion.

"The Eleven Divine Patriarchs...." The middle-aged man's mouth and throat immediately went dry, and his heart began to thump. Ji Shiyi was a name that outsiders didn't know, a name which represented a group of the most ancient members of the Ji Clan.

Any one of that group was an ancestor who the entire Ji Clan would prostrate in worship to.

"Sir... sir, I have never seen the Eleven Divine Patriarchs...." The man trembled; the seemingly imperceptible pressure coming from the owner of the ancient voice caused him to feel as if the entire world was about to fall apart.

"Very well," said the voice, drifting about like a breeze around the middle-aged man. "I won't cause too much trouble for you. Sit here and meditate for the time it takes an incense stick to burn. Then you may leave." The voice was filled with somberness. It caused the middle-aged man's face to instantly flicker. He hesitated for just a moment, then chose to sit down cross-legged.

The tenth Wang Clan Patriarch stood right in front of him, staring off into the black fog. However, the middle-aged man couldn't see him at all.

“Child, I’ve already delayed this person for you,” he said softly to himself. “I’ve fixed your biggest problem for you. The rest of them are suppressed into the Core Formation, which means you still won’t be able to escape. That, in turn, means that even if I help you get away, you’ll still die on the outside. In that case, I may have no choice but to take your perfection away from you now.

“It’s too bad. From time immemorial, it has never been possible to force perfection to develop. I’m not sure what power it was that caused the interference.... If it weren’t for that, I could just grab you and let you grow in my custody. After you reached the Nascent Soul stage, then I could take it from you. Well, you’d better not let me down. You need to get powerful quickly, okay?” The old man’s eyes flickered with a sinister glow. At this moment, he looked incredibly bizarre.

“Only 60 kilometers....” Meng Hao’s eyes glowed brightly. The spot he had been teleported to was not very close to the Rebirth Cave. Normally speaking, such a distance would be nothing to him.

However, he was surrounded by danger on all sides. This distance of 60 kilometres represented either life or death.

He was currently moving at the fastest speed he possibly could.

55 kilometers, 52 kilometers, 50 kilometers.... Meng Hao could now see the shrinking corpse of the Immortal. He was about to fly over it when his expression suddenly changed.

A boom filled the air; multiple members of the various Sects suddenly appeared as they were teleported out into the fog, sending it roiling out in all directions. Their expressions flickered as they saw the group of old men speeding through the air after Meng Hao.

The group included Chen Fan, Han Bei, Chu Yuyan, Wang Youcai, Li Shiqi as well as... Xu Qing.

They saw what was happening; they saw the old men chasing, and they saw who they were chasing. Off in the distance was... Meng Hao!

Because the churning fog had suddenly dispersed, Meng Hao was

completely visible. Everyone could see him; furthermore, he had no inclination to conceal his identity. All eyes were now fixed on him alone.

“Meng... Meng Hao!” said Chen Fan, staring in amazement. His mind spun as he gaped at Meng Hao. He had searched for him for years, but had never been able to pick up his tracks after the year he disappeared. How could he ever have anticipated that he would suddenly catch sight of Meng Hao here?

Chu Yuyan’s face was pale, and her body trembled. She stared blankly at Meng Hao’s garment. Her face filled with bitterness as she suddenly understood that... Fang Mu was Meng Hao!

He was the Cultivator from the State of Zhao with whom she had spent half a year stuck inside a ravine. It hit her like a bolt of lightning. In truth, that lightning bolt had begun brewing within the mental realm. She had even begun to prepare herself then; however, as of now, she couldn’t control the emotions inside of her. Her heart surged with countless complexities.

There were two people in her life that she considered to be unforgettable. One was Meng Hao. She could never forget him because of the twisted feelings he caused that year in the volcano; those events had filled her with hatred she found difficult to put into words.

The second person she found to be unforgettable was Fang Mu. The instant she found out he was Pill Cauldron, she would find herself thinking about him, even though she didn’t know why. Sometimes, his face would appear in her mind, and she would find herself giving a light snort, or occasionally, a slight smile. Other times, her face would grow red.

“Fang Mu.... Meng Hao....” Two faces appeared in her mind, overlapping. In the end, the only thing that remained was deep bitterness and complex emotions.

Wang Youcai looked silently at Meng Hao. His heart was calm, but deep inside, he recalled the scene from all those years ago in the cave of Mount Daqing. He remembered sticking his head out, looking up, and seeing Meng Hao the scholar. 2

Li Shiqi looked at Meng Hao silently, thinking back to their battle years ago.

Han Bei sighed. She was clever and farsighted. The instant she saw the expression on Chu Yuyan's face, some clues as to their relationship suddenly appeared in her mind, although she had no way to completely solve the puzzle. Meng Hao, of course, had left her with a deep impression long ago. Her phoenix-like eyes gazed at him.

Meng Hao.... It was a name that hadn't appeared in the Southern Domain for a very long time. And yet, here he was, blazing as brilliantly as ever!

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1. This is a sort of play on words because "Ji Shiyi" sounds like a name, but the "Shiyi" actually means the number 11
2. Fun fact: Wang Youcai is actually the first named character to appear in ISSTH after Meng Hao in chapter 1

Chapter 311: Now That is a Cultivator!

Meng Hao's face was grim as he looked around at the roiling fog. He immediately bit down on the tip of his tongue, spitting up some blood. As soon as it flew out into the air, it transformed into a blood mist beneath Meng Hao's feet.

This helped him to amplify his speed by several times; he immediately reappeared five kilometers away, next to the shrinking Immortal's corpse.

The instant he did, he coughed up a mouthful of blood, and his once black hair was now white. Just now, he had used one of the multifarious forbidden techniques of the Blood Immortal Legacy. A Core Formation Cultivator could use this technique to instantly gain speed far beyond the normal capability of his body.

It wasn't quite a minor teleportation, but considering the short distance involved, there wasn't much of a difference. Minor teleportation was a divine ability of Nascent Soul Cultivators. As for Core Formation Cultivators, they could use this forbidden art only three times throughout their life.

As Meng Hao's body disappeared, the position he had just occupied collapsed, the air shattering because of the forbidden technique. He would never be able to do something like this using only his own skill and power.

This was the only way to avoid death!

The entire area was locked down with restrictive spells, making teleportation impossible. However, this forbidden art was not a minor teleportation, but rather an explosive increase in speed. However, it caused him to cough up blood, indicating that he had sustained injuries to internal organs. In addition, cracking sounds could be heard from his legs.

His face was pale white. However, he didn't hesitate in the slightest. His pupils glowed violet as he drew from his longevity to heal his injuries.

Meng Hao's longevity had increased after reaching Core Formation; ordinarily speaking, he would be able to live to around four hundred years.

However, as of now, he had already wasted a significant amount of that longevity.

Because of this price, he still looked young, but his face was pallid, something that could not be altered by the Violet Pupil Transformation.

“They’re still gaining.” Around Meng Hao, the Nascent Soul Cultivators from the Ji and Li Clans, despite having been restricted to the great circle of Core Formation, were whistling toward him at top speed.

Meng Hao had evaded them just now, causing the eyes of this collection of Elders to flicker. The fact that he had avoided death just now filled them with surprise.

Han Bei, Chu Yuyan and the others were watching from a distance, hearts filled with shock.

Xu Qing’s hands were balled tightly into fists, and she was gnawing on her lower lip. She watched Meng Hao, her face pale, desiring to help him. However, the panting Meng Hao had just made eye contact with her, and within his gaze was the clear message that he forbade that.

Don’t make all my painstaking effort be for nothing, he told her through the look. She watched on, trembling, tears welling up in her eyes.

One of the old men from the Li Clan shot forward, glaring at Meng Hao. “It’s not that I look down on you, junior,” he said with a cold laugh. “No wonder you were able to kill our Dao Child. But today, you will not be able to escape! You’ll compensate with your life!”

“What a load of crap!” replied Meng Hao, slapping his bag of holding. The blood red mask appeared, and he slipped it on without hesitation. As it melded with his face, a bloody killing aura emanated out. All who saw it were instantly shaken.

Chen Fan and the others were shocked, too, but not too badly. As the sinister blood Qi enveloped the area, they retreated backward a few paces. On the other hand, the faces of the elders from the Ji and Li Clans immediately changed.

Meng Hao’s green robe was suddenly bathed by the red light, making it

seem as if he were clothed in blood itself. The crimson glow and the red mask, which was featureless except for the two eyes, immediately caused the Nascent Soul Cultivators to recall depictions they had seen in their Clans' ancient records.

The Blood Immortal of the Ancient Doom Clan!

It looked exactly the same!

Intense killing intent, boiling murderous desire, immediately erupted above Meng Hao's head into a red-colored Core Qi. It roiled, emanating out in all directions.

Beneath Meng Hao, the Immortal's corpse had shrunk down until it was little more than thirty meters high.

The dozen or so old men from the Ji and Li Clans were still approaching at high speed. One of the eight Ji Clan elders, eyes flashing with intense killing intent, said, "You overestimate yourself!"

In order to ensure his own safety, he had resolved to personally slay Meng Hao. Without any hesitation, nor having any compunctions about damaging his reputation by bullying someone weaker than him, he shot forward ahead of the others, his killing intent billowing to the heavens.

"DIE!!" he cried, his voice sinister. He quickly lifted up his right hand. Normally, Meng Hao wouldn't even have been able to make out his movements because of the speed. Now, though, he could make out a blur of motion.

The man was approaching with rapid speed!

"Without a face!" Meng Hao's eyes were bright red as he waved his right hand. His hair was completely white; however, because it was inundated by the crimson glow, it actually looked red!

The Core Qi seethed, immediately transforming into an enormous face. The left eye was bizarre in appearance, whereas Meng Hao existed in the right eye. It flew out, heading directly toward the Ji and Li elders. A boom filled the air.

Put life and death on the line! End the opponent to assure your own existence!

The instant the boom could be heard, the ground heaved. Everything shook, even the black fog. The explosion was audible even outside of the basin.

The eyes of Patriarch Violet Sieve of the Black Sieve Sect glittered. Behind him, the Spirit Severing Patriarch of the Black Sieve Sect had a similar expression. They flew up, and were about to head into the black fog, when suddenly, the two Spirit Severing Patriarchs from the Violet Fate Sect disappeared. When they blinked back, there were directly in front of the two from the Black Sieve Sect.

“If you take another step forward, don’t blame us for killing you,” said one of the Violet Fate Sect Patriarchs, his voice grim. His eyes glowed with killing intent and fury.

Back within the black fog, the boom continued to echo out. The enormous face which surrounded Meng Hao disintegrated. Blood sprayed from his mouth as nearly half the bones in his body were broken. Countless lacerations shredded his flesh, from which blood spilled out, causing his clothes to truly turn red. The redness of his agreements was no longer caused by the crimson glow in the air; now he was actually wearing a robe of blood!

His body tumbled backward, falling down onto the Immortal’s corpse. Trembling, he gritted his teeth and rose to his feet. Right now, Meng Hao looked very much like he had when he faced up against Wang Tengfei back in the Reliance Sect 1 ... His stubbornness, his tenacity, and his powerful heart would always exist, regardless of whether or not his body was on the verge of collapse!

A reddish glow flickered in his eyes. Blood dripped off of his body down onto the Immortal’s corpse beneath his feet, which was now less than fifteen meters tall.

As for the Nascent Soul Cultivator from the Ji Clan, his body trembled, and his face had fallen. He was not injured, but he looked at Meng Hao

with a serious expression. His attack just now had been backed by the power of the great circle of Core Formation. Even that bit of power should have been more than enough to destroy a Core Formation Cultivator. And yet Meng Hao... was not dead!

Immediately, intense killing intent flickered in the man's eyes, along with greed.

He could clearly see that Meng Hao's Cultivation base was merely at the early Core Formation stage; for him to be able to wield the power he had just now... was only because of the blood-colored mask!

He wasn't the only person who realized this; all of the others at his side began to look toward Meng Hao with flashing eyes.

Meng Hao's attack now had seriously injured himself. However, considering the level of his Cultivation base, the fact that he could withstand an attack from even a suppressed Nascent Soul Cultivator showed how incredibly powerful the mask was.

You could easily say that with the mask on, Meng Hao was absolutely, completely different than before.

However... despite that, he was still not a match for his opponent. His body was on the verge of collapse, like an oil lamp with no oil left in it. Beneath the mask, his face was pale and covered with wrinkles. And yet, his eyes burned with frenzy, and emitted a violet glow.

Again, he burned his longevity to heal himself.

He looked at the dozen or so incoming Cultivators, and then suddenly lifted his head to the sky and laughed. His expression contained unyielding pride, the kind of obstinacy which indicated that he would never bow his head.

He was Grandmaster Pill Cauldron! He was the Ninth Demon Sealer! He was Fang Mu! He... was Meng Hao!

He was born a scholar, but today, he was a Cultivator of the Core Formation stage. He was fighting against a dozen or more experts with Nascent Soul Cultivation bases. They were suppressed, and because of the

blood-colored mask he was almost inhuman. But when you consider the Southern Domain as a whole, for the past thousands of years, he was the only person who could possibly do this!

Therefore, Meng Hao laughed. It was a laughter of no regrets, a laughter filled with lofty sentiment, a laughter filled with stubbornness that soared to the heavens!

Damaging his life force to heal himself, his face beneath the mask rapidly aged. His hair had long since grown completely white. However, from the perspective of an outsider, beneath the crimson glow, his hair was bright red!

Such an image immediately burned a deep impression into everyone who was watching. As all of the Chosen of the Southern Domain teleported out from the crumbling mental realm, the first thing they saw was Meng Hao. The image was branded into their minds, something that they would never forget for a hundred years, for a thousand, for their entire lives!

At this moment, he was like the sun burning in the noon sky, the representative of a generation. Never again would someone like him appear. Never would someone be able to outmatch Meng Hao.

This was what each and every one of them was thinking.

Chosen? Dao Child? Wearing his mask, his crimson hair fluttering, facing up against more than ten Nascent Soul Cultivators and laughing.... The rest of them were like insects!

“Now that... is a Cultivator!” It was hard to say who muttered the words first, but it only took a moment for them to resonate throughout the minds of all the Chosen.

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Note from Er Gen:

Cultivators have what it takes to stand up to Heaven and Earth. Cultivators have the stubbornness to never bow their heads, no matter how bloody the battle. That is a Cultivator. To me, a Cultivator is someone

who stands, covered in blood, hair snow white, facing a host of enemies. And yet, no matter the danger, no matter how difficult the path, a Cultivator will grit his teeth, lift his head up and laugh! In this manner, he will become a legend! That is what a Cultivator is to me.

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1. Do you remember how Meng Hao picked the bloody fingernails out of his palms after getting beat down by Wang Tengfei? And yet he never backed down. That was actually in chapter 17

Chapter 312: Because This Person, Is Filled With Insanity!

Amidst the laughter and the whipping red hair, Meng Hao lifted his right hand. There between his fingers was a violet-colored medicinal pill! This pill contained a devilish will, and the instant it appeared, rumbling filled Heaven and Earth.

An indescribable Qi seethed out from it to fill the surroundings, causing all onlookers' faces to flicker. Without hesitation, Meng Hao placed the pill into his mouth.

The violet-colored pill dissolved with shocking speed, staining his internal organs as if with ink, filling his viscera.

ARRRGHHH!

Meng Hao lifted his head toward the sky and let out a shocking roar. Beneath the mask, his face twisted and distorted. His crimson eyes filled with insanity and billowing killing intent. The blood-colored mask seemed to approve of the Qi which spilled throughout his body; it caused it to spread out even more intensely!

Pain!

Incomprehensible pain!

His entire body felt as if it were being slashed into pieces, as if he were being punished with death by a thousand cuts. As this happened, it released all of the potential of his latent talent and Cultivation base. It was as if a treasure chest within his body had been opened. A final intense pain rushed through him; it felt as if someone had ripped open his chest, pulled out his beating heart and lifted it up to the sky!

Chaos!

Earthshaking chaos!

An indescribable power seemed to take all of the memories in his head and crush them to dust. His will and his consciousness were thrown into

disorder. Within the disorder and chaos, strands of intense and incomparable killing intent filled him!

One strand, one hundred strands, one thousand strands, ten thousand strands, one hundred thousand strands... all the way to ten million strands of killing intent!!

The killing intent sent Meng Hao's mind into chaos. It crushed his Core, sent his soul into insanity, staining it with terrifying frenzy!

The insanity transformed into world-shaking killing dementia. It toppled his thinking ability, melted his mind into nothing, filling him with a devilish will. It turned into a self-destructive desire, which in turn caused his Cultivation base to climb upward.

Mid Core Formation, late Core Formation, great circle of Core Formation.... Meng Hao's roars filled the area, filling everyone with complete shock.

Meng Hao was not experiencing a burning of the soul; this superseded that, because this pill... was the Bedevilment Pill! And this will, was a devilish will!

This person, was filled with insanity!

The Cultivation base burned, releasing the soul. The frenzied will and the desire for self-destruction, transformed into devilish insanity. This was Meng Hao!

His eyes were crimson, filled with blood, with devilishness, with imperceptible malevolence. Beneath the mask, he was growing older. His red hair whipped around him unrestrained.

The image of Meng Hao in this moment was indelibly branded onto the eyes of everyone who was watching.

At the moment, the ten or more Nascent Soul Cultivators, still suppressed into Core Formation, approached Meng Hao. They outnumbered him, and their Cultivation bases were inherently greater than his by far. So they still closed in, each and every one preparing to attack.

It was as if each feared that they would not personally be able to exterminate him, and would thus incur trouble within their Clans.

Their killing intent billowed up to the heavens as they whistled through the air. No one was there to help Meng Hao. In this moment, he was completely alone; the only person who could help him, was he himself. The only person he could rely on, was himself!

Meng Hao's laughter was filled with insanity. It echoed through the air, and as it did, he waved his right hand in front of him.

"Without a face!"

Heaven and Earth shook, and the enormous face once again appeared around Meng Hao. It was larger than before, and even more substantial than before. It did not seem illusory in any way now, but real.

The face towered up, blood flowing from its eyes. The sight was startling and shocking. Like a mad devil, it shot roaring toward the dozen or so incoming Nascent Soul Cultivators.

To the onlookers, Meng Hao seemed like a moth willingly flying into a conflagration, seeking death. And yet in doing so, he unleashed all the splendor of life, causing everyone's hearts to twinge with emotion.

A moth flies into the flame seemingly because the moth loves the flame. It wishes to be reborn within the flame. To onlookers, it would seem that death was unavoidable; however, who could possibly know that this moth had no love of flame? Instead, it wished to use its life to extinguish the flame!

A boom filled the air, rocking everything. Blood sprayed from Meng Hao's mouth as the massive face collapsed. Despite the fact that his Cultivation base was climbing up because of the Bedevilment Pill, he was facing the combined attack of ten or more people. How could he possibly measure up to that?

As the blood shot from his mouth, massive injuries wracked his body. His eyes were listless and a wan smile covered his face as he flopped backward like a kite with its string cut. The faces of his more than ten

opponents all flickered as they attacked again. Their intense killing intent were like sharp arrows preparing to stab through Meng Hao.

However, even as they surged forward in attack, Meng Hao's listless eyes, shone with unbridled frenzy.

"A single word!" he cried, his voice hoarse. Shockingly, he was using the fearsome power of the Bedevilment Pill to fuel the divine ability of the Blood Immortal Legacy.

As the words left his mouth, the collapsing face immediately ceased disintegrating. The cracks which covered it seemed to seethe with ferocity as vast quantities of red mist poured out from them.

The red mist spread out in front of Meng Hao. The massive face seemed to be rapidly passing through time; it began to shrink, and the cracks disappeared. It was complete once again. And then... in the place where previously no mouth could be seen, two lips appeared.

The mouth opened and seemed to be speaking, although no one could hear the sound it uttered. However... as soon as the noiseless sound appeared, the ten or so old men all felt their minds shaking. Streaks of blood instantly covered their bodies, as if they would be ripped to pieces in an instant.

It was at this exact moment that Meng Hao spoke the third sentence.

"The flames of war unify!"

Without a face, a single word, the flames of war unify!

This was the first of the three divine abilities of the Blood Immortal Legacy, forcibly pushed into motion by Meng Hao. Immediately smoke rose up from all directions, along with flames of war, twisting, spiralling, surrounding Meng Hao with a massive swirling pillar of fire. The roaring of it lifted up to the heavens.

More of Meng Hao's bones snapped. Blood showered out from his body as his body was swept off of its feet and sent rolling onto the ground. The recoil of power caused the mask to be violently ripped off his face.

Meng Hao's features were like that of an old man. His face was pale as he lay there on the ground; however, devilish frenzy still flickered within his eyes.

His Cultivation base was already at the point of shattering. His body seemed on the verge of complete ruin. Too much of his longevity had been wasted. However, his heart would not give up. It was with full conscious effort that he chose to continue the burning.

Roars filled the air as the pillar of fire expanded out. The ten or more Nascent Soul Cultivators were slowly pushed away. Shockingly, three of them immediately coughed up blood.

The intense power of this divine ability of Meng Hao's was incredibly shocking.

"The Blood Immortal Legacy is incredible...." said one of the Nascent Soul Cultivators. The expressions of all of the ten or more old men were grim, especially the three who had sustained injuries. Their injuries were not serious, but they were collectively attacking a single Core Formation Cultivator. For this to have happened to them was something they found hard to accept.

"It's over," said another of the old men. They looked at their opponent; he had no power to fight back; he had sustained severe injuries throughout his body. He was like a lamp with no oil left to burn. They slowly advanced toward him, preparing to end this troublesome confrontation.

Xu Qing was trembling. She was just about to rush out when Han Bei reached out and grabbed her arm, holding her back with incredible power.

Xu Qing turned to look at Han Bei, when suddenly Meng Hao laughed.

His skin was pale white, and his features aged; he was no longer young. However, there was something visible inside his face that had always existed there..

His laughter contained something strange, something fierce; it was filled with intense killing intent!

“Awake, my mastiff!” he said. He struggled to raise his right hand and place it gently onto the blood-colored mask. As he spoke the words, his eyes filled with warmth and anticipation.

The moment Meng Hao had reached core Formation, he had been able to sense the mastiff slumbering. He also knew that although it must remain sleeping, it was possible for it to occasionally awaken from sleep for just a moment.

All he need to do was call to it, awaken it. This... was his true killing intent. In fact, everything Meng Hao had been doing up to now had merely been to buy time to allow the mastiff to awaken. The entire time, he had been calling to it silently, over and over again.

Starting within the mental realm, all the way until now, all the way until the fierce and deadly fighting, he had been silently calling to the mastiff. He had been calling it the entire time, all the way up until the moment just now when he finally lost all power to fight back. It was then that the mastiff... finally began to show signs of movement.

The signs of movement contained anxiety, as well as a frenzy similar to that which filled Meng Hao. It seemed as if the mastiff were using all the power it possessed to fight against the slumber which held it. It woke, filled with the same desire it had in the Blood Immortal Legacy tournament; it would protect its master.

The ten or more old men shot forward, and as they did Meng Hao reached out to touch the blood-colored mask. Then, he spoke the words calling the mastiff. The mask instantly began to tremble; it flew up into the air with incredible speed, stopping to hover in front of Meng Hao.

Suddenly, a massive blood-colored screen appeared, over three hundred meters in diameter.

The blood-colored screen looked like an enormous mirror of blood. When it appeared, the surface of the mirror filled with countless ripples, as well as growling sounds which emanated out from within.

The sound of the growling shook heaven and earth, and immediately caused the faces of the dozen or so old men to fall. It sounded like the

mastiff had found an enemy, and was threatening it. The echoing sound filled the air, passing through the black fog to the world outside of the basin.

The Ji Clan Spirit Severing Cultivator who had been stranded by the Wang Clan Patriarch suddenly opened his eyes. His pupils constricted. In front of him, the Wang Clan Patriarch let out a light gasp of surprise.

A frenzied, heaven-shaking roar sounded out from within the blood-colored screen. It was the roar of a wild beast, filled with insanity and billowing killing intent. As the roar filled the air, the ten or so old men in front of Meng Hao immediately experienced unprecedented feelings of life-or-death crisis floating up from their hearts.

It was at this moment that the surface of the blood-colored screen distorted. It protruded... as if something were trying to break out!

Chapter 313: She's... an Immortal!

The intense feeling of life-or-death crisis caused the elders from the Ji and Li Clans to feel shaken at heart. Their eyes shone with intense astonishment.

Considering their Cultivation bases, age, and vast experience, there were not very many things in the world which could truly cause them to be astonished.

But now, deep feelings of danger welled up simultaneously within their hearts.

For Nascent Soul Cultivators to feel crisis like this also filled them with vast terror.

It was extremely difficult to practice cultivation all the way to the Nascent Soul Stage. Many, many people fell while treading such a path; for these men to reach this point meant that they possessed good luck and had experienced plenty of fortunate circumstances. Now, however, facing this life-or-death crisis had a profound effect on their hearts and minds.

For the first time, these more than ten men suddenly felt regret....

However, before they had the chance to retreat, an intense roaring sound poured out from the three hundred meter wide blood-red screen. It seemed to be filled with enough power to destroy any obstacle in its way.

The sound of it filled the air, causing everyone that heard it to be completely shaken in heart and mind. Some people with less powerful Cultivation bases coughed up blood. The ten or so old men watched on in shock as the massive blood-colored screen suddenly seemed to be rent open.

From within billowed a massive glowing red light. Within the red light... could be seen....

An enormous, paw, stretching out toward them!

It was only one paw, something that belonged to a gigantic wild beast. It possessed long, razor-sharp claws, and was covered with thick, red fur. It

carried with it an indescribable, demonic Qi. It was only one paw, about thirty meters in size, that emerged from the blood-red screen; it ignored the force which was suppressing Cultivation bases, and shot out.

The instant the claw appeared, an intense, terrifying Qi also could be clearly sensed. It exploded out, filling the area, causing the faces of the dozen or so old men to fill with shock. Their pupils constricted, and they retreated backward, minds reeling.

“That’s....”

“The Qi of Spirit Severing!!”

“Dammit! How could this Meng Hao have a Spirit Severing Qi with him!?!?”

The scalps of the ten or so old men immediately went numb, and the sense of crisis grew even stronger. In the very instant in which they attempted to flee, the paw which had emerged from the blood-colored screen raised into the air. Then, it struck down toward them.

This was of course the paw of the sleeping Blood Mastiff. During the fleeting ten years which had passed, it had been incapable of awakening. However, after Meng Hao reached Core Formation, a greater connection had appeared between them. Meng Hao’s repeated calls, and the critical moment of life-or-death he faced, were an intense provocation that caused the Blood Mastiff to suddenly wake up.

In this moment, all it could do was extend its paw into the world and strike down.

A roaring sound filled heaven and earth. The mastiff, which had already evolved to the Spirit Severing level, sent its paw whistling down. Three of the elders from the Ji Clan had expressions filled with insanity as, unable to evade, their Cultivation bases exploded.

The three men emitted blood-curdling screams. Blood sprayed from their mouths, and their bodies began to collapse. Their Nascent Souls made to flee, but before they could get very far, were shattered by the paw.

Among the elders from the Li Clan, there were four who were too slow

to evade. This slowness resulted in their instant death.

A boom could be heard as the Blood Mastiff's massive paw descended onto the four of them. Their bodies were instantly turned into mutilated flesh; their Nascent Souls were incapable of fleeing, and were immediately crushed into powder!

This scene caught everyone by surprise. In the blink of an eye, of the dozen or so Nascent Soul Cultivators, seven had been instantly slain!!

These seven men were incapable of withstanding even a single blow from the paw of the Blood Mastiff, and were thoroughly and instantly exterminated. This instantly caused the rest of the old men to be filled with fear; the blood drained from their faces, their hearts began to race, and their scalps went numb. The only thing they could think of at the moment was to flee as quickly as possible.

Everything was going opposite to expectation, and was exceeding the limits of their imagination. How could they possibly have predicted that Meng Hao, a trifling Core Formation Cultivator, would be... so difficult to kill!

They had no way of knowing that to Meng Hao, reaching Core Formation was merely the first stepping stone on his path to the top. After reaching Core Formation, he had a vast array of magical techniques and other methods that he could employ.

You could say that Meng Hao had saved up everything for an explosive finale!

The boom was still echoing out as the mastiff's paw slowly began to fade away. The massive blood-colored screen also began to disappear. Meng Hao grabbed the mask as it fell toward the ground.

At the moment, Han Bei and the others seemed to be incapable of even breathing. They stared at the oilless lamp which was Meng Hao. None of them had ever imagined that events could turn about in the way they had.

"Blood Divinity!" breathed Li Shiqi, trembling. "That was a Blood Divinity!!" The others immediately thought back to the Blood Immortal

Legacy tournament, and the blood-colored mastiff.

Back then, they'd had no idea who the mastiff belonged to. Now, you could say that they understood, but had little time to think about it. Seeing everything that they just had, with their own eyes, caused their minds to spin.

Clutching the blood-colored mask, Meng Hao produced some medicinal pills, which he consumed. Gritting his teeth, he struggled to his feet. He looked over at the group of people. His gaze lingered on Xu Qing for a moment, and then, he turned and continued to head toward the Rebirth Cave with as much speed as he could muster.

"Fang Mu...." cried Chu Yuyan. Seeing him turn to leave, she suddenly realized she had no way of knowing when she might see him again. If she didn't call out, perhaps she would never have another chance to do so.

Meng Hao's body quivered slightly, but he continued onward.

He was well aware that the Nascent Soul eccentrics had been intimidated by the sudden appearance of the Blood Mastiff, and its slaying of their seven compatriots. However, it wouldn't take long for them to realize what was really going on. After a moment's hesitation, they would surely see that Meng Hao might seem strong on the outside, but was actually incomparably weak. Then, it would only be moments before they went after him again.

As for the Blood Mastiff, after attacking just now, it had instantly fallen back into slumber. Now, it didn't matter how many times Meng Hao called to it, it wouldn't be able to awaken.

"All paths to the outside are sealed tight. My only option is... the Rebirth Cave." Gritting his teeth, Meng Hao whistled forward through the air.

It was at this point that the remaining seven or eight old men who had not been slain, suddenly ceased their fleeing. Their expressions were now filled with hesitation. It seemed they were analyzing everything that had just happened. Considering their age and experience, it only took the space of about ten breaths for them to grasp the situation. Unsightly expressions appeared on their faces; they immediately turned and headed

back.

In the blink of an eye, all of the fleeing Nascent Soul Cultivators once again headed in pursuit of Meng Hao.

Meng Hao was only about twenty-five kilometers from the Rebirth Cave, when from within it, a soft sigh could suddenly be heard.

It was the sigh of a woman. The sound was completely unexpected, but the instant it filled the air, the faces of the remaining Nascent Soul Cultivators flickered, and they coughed up blood as they tumbled backward, bodies shaking. Dumbstruck looks filled their faces; it seemed that whatever they had just encountered was even more intensely powerful than the Blood Mastiff.

Within their trembling bodies, their Nascent Souls also shook, and their fear climbed to the pinnacle.

It wasn't just them. All of the Cultivators outside of the basin also heard the sigh, and it sent their minds and heart shaking. Blood sprayed from their mouths. Unprecedented looks filled the faces of the Spirit Severing Patriarchs from the various Sects.

"That's...."

Their faces fell and blood erupted from their mouths; they appeared to have received severe internal injuries!

Within the fog of the basin, the Spirit Severing Cultivator from the Ji Clan also coughed up blood. The astonishment on his face could not be any more intense as he heard the sound from the Rebirth Cave.

This was not the voice of one of the strange life forms that existed there; this was the sigh of a woman!

Within the fog, the Wang Clan Patriarch, who was invisible to everyone, felt his entire body shaking. "Who is that...? She's... an Immortal!!" It was as if a violent storm had kicked up within him; an intensely somber look filled his face, and his eyes glowed brightly. Threads of dread and shock filled his eyes as he looked toward the Rebirth Cave.

It was at this moment that the voice of a woman could be heard coming from the Rebirth Cave.

The voice was warm, and accompanied by another soft sigh. “Years ago, you accidentally loosened the seal which held me. That counts as sowing Karma.... You cannot come to the Rebirth Cave today. Go, I’ll help you to escape. This counts as reaping Karma.” As the voice echoed out from the cave, a white, glowing light could suddenly be seen flying out.

It was a scale!

A fish scale!

Even as it flew forth, it suddenly also appeared to be a feather.

The feather of a roc!

The scale-like feather flew out with incredible speed, almost immediately appearing directly in front of Meng Hao. As it did, it immediately branded itself onto his forehead. Meng Hao’s entire body shook as a warm power surged out from the scale-like feather, filling his entire body.

Immediately, his Cultivation base became stable. It was no longer burning and collapsing. Instead, it was completely restored. As before, he was at the early Core Formation Stage. In the blink of an eye, his wounds were healed by nearly twenty percent.

In fact, even his longevity was increased by a bit; Meng Hao’s face was no longer that of an old man. It looked young, as it had before. The paleness of it, however, could not be changed.

The whiteness of his hair was also not possible to change.

“I will lend you the power of a roc. Go. Leave this place....” As the voice echoed out, Meng Hao’s body suddenly felt an incredible power pushing at him, sweeping up against his body, propelling him. Suddenly, he began to shoot forward like a roc.

The eight Nascent Soul Cultivators hadn’t the slightest inclination to block him. The voice of the woman from the Rebirth Cave was enough to

send terror into the hearts of anyone in the area.

Meng Hao had no time to think as he suddenly shot out of the basin and appeared in the outside world, in front of the eyes of the Cultivators of all the Sects and Clans of the Southern Domain.

What they saw was something like a shooting star. Within the shooting star was Meng Hao, his hair white, his robe the color of blood.

Meng Hao's eyes glowed with confusion, but only for a moment, and then was replaced with understanding. He knew who it was that was helping him.

"The roc.... She's the roc that was flying toward the Rebirth Cave that year.... But why is she saving me? How exactly did I sow Karma with her...?"

"Everyone in the League of Demon Sealers is heartless...." she said with a sigh. "You're on your own now." As her words echoed in his ears, his eyes went wide.

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If you would like to review chapters regarding the roc, check out chapters 104, 110, 111, 112

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